About the Cover Design:

Since its inaugural issue in 2020, the *Child and Family Journal of Innovative Practice and Research* has been a home for integrating research and practice from universities, clinical centers, and communities. Our logo represents our dedication to innovation and sparking new ideas and connections, while being held up by the core value of the dignity and worth of the human person. The photo on the cover depicts a 2016 mural by the French-Tunisian artist eL Seed, painted on the side of the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work building. The 60x40 ft^2 "calligraffiti" work depicts a quote by Sam Houston, translated into Arabic: "Knowledge is the food of genius, and my son, let no opportunity escape you to treasure up knowledge." Read more about eL Seed's mural here. Photo was originally published in the UH GCSW Photo Gallery "eL Seed Mural 2016." Logo and cover design by Hailey Park, for the *Child and Family Journal of Innovative Practice and Research* at the University of Houston.

CHILD AND FAMILY JOURNAL
OF INNOVATIVE PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Volume IV, Issue 1 | October 2023

The Child and Family Center for Innovative Research | Title IV-E Child Welfare Education Project

The University of Houston | Graduate College of Social Work

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Monit Cheung, Ph.D., LCSW
Professor in Social Work
Mary R. Lewis Endowed Professor in Children & Youth
Graduate College of Social Work | University of Houston

EDITORIAL BOARD

If you are interested in serving on the Editorial Board for *Child and Family Journal for Innovative Practice and Research*, please email Dr. Monit Cheung at mcheung@uh.edu with your curriculum vitae. We look forward to working with you as a team. The first volume was published in May 2020 (Volume 1, Issue 1). All previous issues of this e-journal can be retrieved from this LINK.

To submit an article to the CFJ, please email Hailey Park, Editorial Manager, at hapark@cougarnet.uh.edu.

CONTENTS

JOURNAL AIM

Child and Family Journal for Innovative Practice and Research

Child and Family Journal for Innovative Practice and Research (CFJ) provides an integrated practice-research platform for all child and family programs, agencies, and institutions in the United States and globally to share child welfare research and practice experiences. It aims to provide updated and creative information to promote child and family well-being in communities, universities, and clinical or research centers. Our contributors are scholars and practitioners working to share knowledge, practice insights, service outcomes, and sources of professional development from local to international.

Background

The CFJ is sponsored by the Child and Family Center for Innovative Research (CFCIR) and the Graduate College of Social Work (GCSW) at the University of Houston (UH). The CFCIR aligns with the GCSW to improve youth and family well-being, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and promote social justice. Under the center branches, the Child Welfare Education Project (CWEP) is a program in partnership with federal Title IV-E programs to prepare Master's level social work students to pursue a child welfare career and promote workforce effectiveness in public child welfare. Additionally, CWEP prepares its students to develop reliable systems and professional networks locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally. Furthermore, the CFCIR supports faculty and social work researchers in conducting innovative research and practice for children and families. These multilevel connections highlight the Center's commitment to providing innovative care on micro, mezzo, and macro levels to children and families; empowering students, faculty, practitioners, and researchers to succeed in their careers; promoting social justice; and decreasing racial disparities in both local and global communities.

Aim and Scope

Along with the mission of the CFCIR and GCSW at the University of Houston, the CFJ aims to provide a platform for describing the multilevel partnerships in the child and family sector. It also delivers updates on child and family practices, creative research ideas and outcome data, policy summaries, and educational development reflections that aim to strengthen and expand the field of child and family services.

The CFJ values summaries or progress reports of any form focusing on child and family services, such as: short stories, case studies, poems, personal or professional reflections, artwork, photos, book reviews, and other innovative works. All publications must reflect the core values and ethics of social work. One volume, each with two issues, will be distributed annually. Submission and publication are made online without additional cost or compensation to the contributors. The contributors must include a statement with their submission that it is their original work, not considered or published in other sources. References are cited in APA 7th Edition style.

Mission

- Develop bridges between practice and research by sharing innovative works, updates, and experiences among professionals, faculty, staff, and students for use in child and family services.
- Make research within the field of child and family studies accessible to the general public, from any background, by publishing in an online and open-access format.
- Highlight the importance of child and family services and collaboration within the field, through professional exchange among multilevel partnerships, to promote social work practice and academic development.

EDITORIAL

Striving to Support Youth and Families in Communities through Focused Research

Monit Cheung, PhD, LCSW | Editor-in-Chief
Hailey Park, MT-BC | MSW Candidate, Managing Editor

Graduate College of Social Work, University of Houston | Houston, TX

Research in the child welfare field acts as a cornerstone for current and future practice. In the same way, investigating current practices and procedures creates methodology, and informs researchers on what still needs to be learned. This research-informed practice and practice-informed research are key to a successful field, and this is what we hope to facilitate through the *Child and Family Journal for Innovative Practice and Research* (CFJ). To improve child and family wellbeing, we must continuously evaluate practices, reflect on system structures, and obtain feedback.

The theme of this CFJ issue is "aging out of care." Each year, thousands of youth leave the foster system to enter adulthood without reuniting with family or finding a permanent home. Through research and examples from clinicians nationwide, we learn the best practices to serve these youth and provide them with the support they need to live healthy, successful, independent, *and* interdependent lives as adults. We report the innovative ideas of a youth program set in place on a college campus and hear from the perspectives of providers who prepare youth for their transition to adulthood.

In our featured article, Dr. Hui Huang and colleagues describe the Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC) in Texas and report six types of adult living preparation services. They use qualitative data shared by four TRAC coaches in focus group meetings to support planning and delivering comprehensive services for 850 aging-out foster youth. Once the youth exit care, they face multidimensional challenges. Preparation and transitioning adjustment are indeed critical factors to consider when planning and implementing these services. In our practice update corner, Dr. Sharva Hampton-Campbell describes The Village Project in Illinois, focusing on services which support former foster youth through their college education.

With an infographic format, Hailey Park summarizes current literature to support mentoring services with five eye-catching points describing successful mentors' characteristics. Ms. Park also reviews an article by Romanelli et al. (2009), "Best Practices for Mental Health in Child Welfare: Parent Support and Youth Empowerment Guidelines." Additionally, we provide children and youth resources in this issue to continue our effort to increase service visibility, and utilization by those who need them.

Even though the information presented in this issue is only a small portion of the work to help foster children prepare for their adulthood, the CFJ authors and editors hope their reports inspire students, professionals, and decision-makers to investigate the work being done in their own communities to support youth transitioning to adulthood. While research often gives us a helpful large-scale perspective of problems and potential solutions, the real work must be done in our local communities. For that reason, we thank each and every one of our authors and readers for doing this work to help children, adolescents, and their families.

While future CFJ issues may have different themes, youth in the child welfare system will always remain a priority. We welcome your contributions through this journal to strive for ongoing learning, growing, and improving practice in child and family welfare.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Focus Group Meetings with TRAC

ABSTRACT
The Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC) provides the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) AfterCare services and Transition Case Management and Financial Services in Region 3 of Texas (TRAC, 2023). Every year, TRAC serves approximately 850 youth. In this article, the authors describe TRAC's services and share viewpoints from four TRAC coaches, with quotes from focus group meetings.

KEYWORDS
Transitional care, preparation for adult living, resource management, Texas programs, foster youth

Hui Huang, PhD, MSW, MS, MA
Catherine A. LaBrenz, PhD, LMSW
Eusebius Small, PhD, MSW
Scott D. Ryan, PhD, MSW, MBA

School of Social Work, University of Texas at Arlington | Arlington, TX

The Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC) provides the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) AfterCare/Transition Case Management and Financial Services in Region 3 of Texas (TRAC, 2023). TRAC receives referrals from case management agencies. Every year, TRAC serves approximately 850 youth. This includes 500 youth in the process of leaving foster care in the future and 350 youth and/or young adults who will exit care within 6 months, or have already exited care.

Depending on the age of the youth, TRAC offers specific services: the Casey Life Skills Assessment is available to youth ages 14-15, the PAL life skills training is provided to youth ages 16-18, and Transition and Financial Management (TFM) Services are extended to youth and young adults ages 17½ to 21. Each youth or young adult receiving TFM services is paired with a dedicated coach. In July 2023, the first author conducted focus group meetings with a group of coaches and gathered insights about their services. This article quoted statements from four coaches (A, B, C, and D). Six key types of services offered by TRAC coaches are outlined below. The first three types of services are directly linked to education, while the last three types pertain to various aspects of foster youth's lives. Together, these highlight promising services that can support youth transitioning out of foster care.

Type One: Transition Planning
The coaches work with foster youth aged 17½ to assist in planning their transition out of foster care. They provide guidance and information about available options, emphasizing the consequences of leaving care, including how it may impact their educational pursuits. When asked about the education goals of these youth, the coaches shared that only 30%-40% of their clients want to go on to college, and a lot of their clients do not have high school diplomas.

Coach A: And when I tell you, especially if they haven't left care yet, it's like don't leave without it (referring to high school diploma and GED). Because if you leave without it, chances are you're not going to get it… You have to worry about everything else and school takes the backseat, right?

Type Two: Referrals to Educational Resources

The coaches assist foster youth who do not have a high school diploma or GED in identifying appropriate educational programs that align with the youth's schedule and interests (e.g., GED, trade schools). When being asked about resources for supporting the educational pursuits of the youth not in college, the coaches shared how they support these youth.

Coach A: Find GED classes. It's hard for them to really go back into high school because they're going to have to be working. So, they can't do an 8:00 to 3:00 Monday through Friday. Now there are some like Dallas [College] can. I think you either do it in the morning or you do it in the afternoon or you do it in the evening. So, tell them they can go there and still have time to work.

Coach B: And then there's, you know, some of our youth. They want to do trades. So, we help them look for trade schools or schools that have certificate programs where we can get them into those.

Type Three: Connect Youth with College Education

For foster youth who are prepared for college, the coaches facilitate their transition into college by providing services such as helping with the FASFA application, connecting the youth with foster care liaisons, and enhancing their time management and communication skills. When being asked about resources for supporting youth in college, the coaches shared how they support these youth.

Coach C: So, we make sure that when it's time to do FASFA and those big things for education [referring to critical tasks with deadlines], that we're like okay. Yeah, we'll help you. We'll sit with you. I've seen XXX and XXX sit side by side with youth to help them get through that application and you know show them 'Okay. Well, we're going to figure this out. We're going to problem solve.'

Coach A: A very inviting foster care liaison, because I tell all my youth we need to go meet them, right? And here's all their information. But someone [referring to foster care liaison] who's very open, then the youth were more apt to go like, 'OK, this is a safe person, I can go ask'.

Coach A: I recommend for all of our youth just starting out, unless they're going straight to a university, to only take two classes their first semester because it's so different than high school. They're so much more responsible for their work outside of class. And then I said if you do well, then hey, I would add more the next semester.

Coach A: They may be in a class and not understanding something, but they will not raise their hand and say, 'hey, what do you mean by that?' Or go see the teacher after or in their office hours. It's like, 'guys, you just got to open your mouth and say, hey, I didn't get that. I'm not understanding that.' And I said 'they will work with you and there are tutors, because yes, you're gonna have classes you're gonna struggle and that's normal'.

Type Four: Assist with Practicing Life Skills

The coaches recognize that many transitional foster youth might not have the chance to acquire essential life skills typically learned within a family setting. Therefore, the coaches create opportunities for youth to learn and practice life skills such as communication and emotion management skills. When being asked about resources that are needed to support former foster youth in college, the coaches pointed out the importance of strengthening youths' life skills, and shared their experiences of assisting youth with practicing these skills.

Coach C: We'll be with them to make a doctor's appointment. And they'll hand us the phone, like, 'I don't know what to say.' I'm like, 'no, tell him you need an appointment. This is your name, this is your date of birth. They'll ask you what's going on.' You know, like that's what happens in parenting and being in a home with support, you know? You learn how to advocate. You learn how to do these things with your parent right there helping you. You know. But if you don't have that, then everything feels scary.

Coach C: Regulation is something that is taught to like, yeah, you know, you do it in a million ways in a family where parents are really involved, you know? And you're not saying we're going to regulate now. You're just are showing these things you know.

Coach A: I've had some youth when it's been like you know 'I'm sorry. I just get so mad. I know I shouldn't do this.' It's like 'Honey, frustration happens with everyone and frustration could totally lead to anger. It does for me. So, this is not making you weird or strange. It means you're frustrated and so let's take a break and then we'll come back.' I said but 'that's normal.' Because a lot of times they're thinking that their behaviors not normal and people will judge them. And you know, he'd been told so many times while in care that, you know, they got onto him when he'd be frustrating and angry. Instead of saying, 'OK and in your position, I'll probably be doing the exact same thing.'

Type Five: Assist with Housing Vouchers

TRAC also has housing case managers who help youth in the process of obtaining vouchers.

Coach D: TRAC can assist you in obtaining a voucher, but it's still a waiting period… you need to have employment. You need to have all your documents and so once you have your documents and you have your employment, then we can start that three-to-nine-month waiting list.

Type Six: Assist with Obtaining and Maintaining Employment

TRAC also offers support in employment through its WorkForce Program. TRAC has an advocate dedicated to helping youth get employed and keeping their job. TRAC hosts job fairs periodically. The coaches also prepare youth for interviews and jobs through role play.

Coach A: When we help a youth prepare for a job, we role play. We role play how the interview might go, we role play when there's an issue with another coworker… How do you work that out? Do you scream and yell and cuss them out and leave and text your manager later? No, we don't do that. You know, like we role play that.

Conclusion

TRAC provides holistic services to youth transitioning out of foster care. Services align with key dimensions of well-being for youth, such as education, employment, housing, and general life skills (Washburn et al., 2022). A study on TRAC (Scannapieco et al., 2016) showed that TRAC has a positive influence on the youth receiving services. Overall, after receiving TRAC services, youth show significant improvement in four domains of self-sufficiency: education, employability, financial literacy, and housing (Scannapieco et al., 2016). Given the robust nature of services provided, future research could explore the effectiveness of TRAC in improving youths' long-term outcomes and build evidence for this model to be replicated.

References

Scannapieco, M., Smith, M., & Blakeney-Strong, A. (2016). Transition from foster care to independent living: Ecological predictors associated with outcomes. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 33,* 293-302. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-015-0426-0

Transition Resource Action Center. (2023). Services. https://traconline.org/services/

Washburn, M., Yu, M., LaBrenz, C.A., & Palmer, A. (2022). The impacts of COVID-19 on LGBTQ+ foster youth alumni. *Child Abuse & Neglect.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105866

PRACTICE UPDATES

The Village Project: Nurturing Success in Foster Youth Through Higher Education

Sharva Hampton-Campbell, PhD

The Village Project, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign | Urbana, IL

Background

Growing up in Louisiana, I was raised by my maternal great-aunt, the matriarch of a sprawling village that extended from my family to the entire neighborhood block. Her small farm, abundant with fruits, vegetables, and chickens, served as a lifeline for our community. Weekly harvests not only sustained our village but also provided employment opportunities for those seeking work in the fields, a modern-day Harriet Tubman leading busloads of individuals on a journey from Michigan to Florida.

Community Focus

Inspired by my great aunt's compassion and legacy of community service, I embarked on a mission to continue her work. After her passing during my first year in college, I pursued a degree in social work, driven by the desire to help those in need and offer opportunities for gaining employable skills. Alongside earning my bachelor's and master's degrees, my partner and I became licensed foster parents -- extending our village to include a network of foster parents, family, and friends.

Our journey in foster care spanned over two decades, during which we discovered that the unique needs of teens matched our household schedule. This revelation led to not only opening our home to teenage foster youth but also providing case management and independent living skills training. As I climbed the professional ladder and took on more administrative roles, my travel increased. When one of our foster youths shared that they felt abandoned because I was gone so frequently, I knew it was time to surrender our licenses as foster parents. After doing so, I sought a way to continue supporting this vulnerable population.

Motivation, Mission, and Impact

Alarmed by statistics revealing the challenges foster youth face in education, I pursued a doctoral degree in higher education. My research focused on the impact of campus-based support services on the first-year experience of former foster youth during their first year of post-secondary education, leading to the creation of The Village Project (TVP).

TVP operates on a two-pronged approach to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of former foster youth pursuing a 4-year degree:

I. Fostering Academic, Social & Emotional Success (FASES)
   a. **Dine & Align:** A monthly liaison-facilitated dinner where students learn about campus and community resources, while sharing a family-style meal.
   b. **The Hub:** A monthly peer-led session where youth share experiences and garner support from each other as a means for fostering community-building.

II. Host Family Program
   a. **We Care:** Provides care packages for students throughout the academic year.

b. **A Home Away From Home:** Offers support during school breaks and as needs arise for the youth.

       TVP has made a significant impact since its inception in the Fall 2022 semester at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Ten students registered in the program in Fall 2022, one graduated in Summer 2023, and two joined the program in Fall 2023. Fifty percent of the students benefitted from support by completing SNAP benefits applications to alleviate food insecurity, and 30% were approved for academic and mental health support through the Illinois Department of Human Services Office of Disability Services. With an average of 7-10 students attending monthly programming, participants have learned to access resources to address their diverse learning and mental health needs, food insecurity, and housing issues.

       Governors State University implemented Achieving Completion with Excellence (ACE) this fall using the TVP model. As we continue to expand, I aim to incorporate The Village Project model into all public four-year universities in Illinois. By nurturing success through education, TVP continues the legacy of my great aunt, proving that it takes a village to create lasting change and empower the next generation.

If you are interested in supporting the program, contact the director Dr. Sharva Hampton-Campbell at shamcamp@illinois.edu**. For additional information about The Village Project and its initiatives, please reach out to:**
Dr. Sharva Hampton-Campbell
Director, The Village Project
Email: shamcamp@illinois.edu
Phone: 217-202-5498

Your inquiries and support are crucial in continuing the impactful work of The Village Project. We look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of former foster youth pursuing higher education.

RESEARCH REVIEW

Infographic: The Impact of Mentorship on Youth Aging Out of Care

Hailey Park, MT-BC | MSW Candidate

Graduate College of Social Work, University of Houston | Houston, TX

The following pages depict in a graphic format the research surrounding the impact of mentorship on youth aging out of care, followed by the cited sources.

Mentorship & aging out of the foster system:

A REVIEW OF RECENT LITERATURE

Infographic by Hailey Park, MT-BC

Background:

Over 19,000 teens aged out of foster care in 2021.

A growing body of research indicates that mentorship is an effective support for youth aging out of the foster system. "Relational approaches", whether naturally-occurring or set up through various programs, can be avenues for youth to navigate challenges and contribute to resiliency and normalcy (Alford et al., 2019).
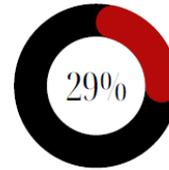
Definition:

Essential components of mentorship include "creating **caring, empathetic, consistent,** and **long-lasting** relationships, often with some combination of **role modeling, teaching, and advising**" (*Mentoring*, n. d.)

Of the 19K+ teens who aged out:

Nearly 1 in 4 report becoming a parent between ages 19-21.

29% experience homelessness between ages 19-21.

29%

Just 57% report being employed (full- or part-time) at age 21.

(Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022)

SUPPORT FOR MENTORSHIP ACCORDING TO DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES & CONCEPTS

ATTACHMENT THEORY

Insecure attachment in childhood can impact foster youth throughout their lives, especially in teen years, causing difficulty regulating emotions. Mentors can fill in this space, providing consistent support and teaching healthy emotional coping skills.

(Cherry, 2023; Gander & Buchheim 2015)

ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the difference between current and potential levels of cognitive development. Learning through interacting with others (typically adults) is key to bridging this gap. Mentors can be this positive role model to exemplify familiar but unmastered skills.

(Kurt, 2020)

CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY

Cultural-Historical Acitivity Theory (CHAT) refers to an interdisciplinary approach to studying human learning and development. It demonstrates how "children's relationship to the world is, from the beginning, a social relation" and how culture is ever-present in human activity. Therefore, mentorship activities can be key to teens' continual social learning and development.

(Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition, 2010)

THE NEED FOR COMMITTED ADULT RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Some states' permanency planning and policies have emphasized the need for committed adults, such as mentors, as youth age out of care (Eyster & Oldmixon, 2007).

Michigan
Youth board stated that "The state should provide support that will connect every foster youth age 14 or older with a mentor or other caring adult in their lives."

New York:
City Administration for Children's Services "trains frontline staff to help foster youth reconnect to family members or other caring adults" to help create a lifelong relationship with an adult.

Massachusetts:
The Lifelong Family Connections for Adolescents program helps aging-out youth "identify caring adults who are willing and able to make a lifelong commitment", provides training, and more.

California:
Child welfare agencies must take action to ensure that "no child leaves foster care without a lifelong connection to a committed adult."

"How can young people be helped to develop **relational skills** and **interpersonal connections** in a system in which the **major federally funded program** has the specific goal of 'independent' rather than '**interdependent**' living?"

- Rosemary J. Avery, 2011

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL MENTORS

01 PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT & REGULATION

02 GUIDE INFORMATION PROCESSING

03 SIMULATE NORMALCY

04 MODEL TRUST AND DEPENDABILITY

05 CREATE MEANINGFUL & RELATIONAL SHARED EXPERIENCES

(ALFORD ET AL., 2019)

References

Alford, K. A., Denby, R. W., and Gomez, E. (2019). Emphasizing relational competence in mentoring programs. *Children's Voice*, 28(1), 36-38. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48626307

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2022, May 16). Child Welfare and Foster Care Statistics. https://www.aecf.org/blog/child-welfare-and-foster-care-statistics#Learn%20More%20About%20Child%20Wel%C2%ADFare%20in%20The%20Unit%C2%ADEd%20States

Avery, R. J. (2011). The potential contribution of mentor programs to relational permanency for youth aging out of foster care. *Child Welfare*, 90(3), 9-26. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48623316

Cherry, K. (2023). What is attachment theory? The importance of early emotional bonds. Verywell Mind. https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-attachment-theory-2795337

Eyster, L., & Oldmixon, S. L. (2007). State policies to help youth transition out of foster care. https://marylandcasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/NGA-state-policies-to-help-youth-transition-out-of-foster-care.pdf

Gander, M., and Buchheim, A. (2015). Attachment classification, psychophysiology and frontal EEG asymmetry across the lifespan: a review. Frontiers in Human Neuroscience. doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2015.00079

Kurt, S. (2020, July 11). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and scaffolding. *Educational Technology*. https://educationaltechnology.net/vygotskys-zone-of-proximal-development-and-scaffolding/

Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition. (2010*). Cultural-Historical Activity Theory*. https://lchc.ucsd.edu/Pubs/lchc.encyc.pdf

Mentoring. (n.d.) Youth.gov. https://youth.gov/youth-topics/mentoring

ARTICLE REVIEW

A Reflection on "Best Practices for Mental Health in Child Welfare: Parent Support and Youth Empowerment Guidelines" through the Lens of Aging out of the Foster System

Hailey Park, MT-BC | MSW Candidate

Graduate College of Social Work, University of Houston | Houston, TX

ABSTRACT

Mental health support and resources are a necessary element of a holistic and complete child welfare system. Considering the high incidence of mental health needs among foster youth, it is imperative that child welfare agencies have systems, protocols, and resources that help youth and their families navigate these needs. In their 2009 article, Romanelli and her colleagues address this issue, presenting guidelines related to effectively helping youth in care manage their mental health. The following summarizes their guidelines and key points, illuminating their importance specifically to youth aging out of foster care.

Article Reviewed:

Romanelli, L. H., Hoagwood, K. E., Kaplan, S. J., Kemp, S. P., Hartman, R. L., Trupin, C., Soto, W., Pecora, P. J., LaBarrie, T. L., & Jensen, P. S. (2009). Best practices for mental health in child welfare: parent support and youth empowerment guidelines. *Child Welfare*, *88*(S1), 189-212.

Overview

Mental health support and resources are a key element of a holistic and complete child welfare system. Mental health care is a *necessary* support within the system, as some studies have shown that nearly 1 in 5 youth in the foster system have a mental health diagnosis – a statistic that is especially relevant to youth about to age out of the foster system (Keefe et al., 2021). With these adolescents transitioning to adulthood, they must have structures in place to help guide them as they enter the adult world and navigate their diagnoses, symptoms, treatments, and more. This need is precisely what Romanelli and her colleagues address in their 2009 article, which presents guidelines related to effectively helping youth in care manage their mental health. The authors created 15 guidelines during the 2007 Best Practices for Mental Health in Child Welfare Consensus Conference, which they then categorized into two broad areas – *parent engagement* and *youth empowerment*.

Summary and Reflection

The authors begin by providing an overview of the key issues related to these areas and outlining existing supports, before briefly discussing each guideline and the implications these guidelines have for

the field of child welfare. Overall, a main theme running throughout the article is *prevention*: if youth are supported and given the treatment, resources, and empowerment they need and deserve as they age out of the system, the more positive their adulthood will look in the future. The authors also emphasized the importance of family support services: the "promotion of active, informed, and involved parents in their child's [mental health] treatment or service plan" (p. 192). One important consideration regarding parent and family support is the ever-changing definition of "family." In other words, how might the family of one foster child look different from another's, and what does this mean in terms of their support system after turning 18? For example, one adolescent might have a foster parent willing and able to support them through any mental health treatment, while another may be living in group placements, Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs), or be without a placement (in CWOP). With these varying circumstances in mind, it is important to consider who that youth might consider to be a "family" resource: including older siblings, aunts or uncles, or fictive kin.

Romanelli and her colleagues additionally emphasized the importance of youth empowerment and support. They defined empowerment as "a process which leads to an enhanced sense of self-competency, community influence, and skills development" (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995, cited in Romanelli et al., 2009, p. 193). The authors emphasize that foster youth depend on the child welfare system to provide these necessary support services but that they are unfortunately not universally provided. An article by Kaplan and her colleagues in 2009 outlines the types of support services, which Romanelli subsequently cites. When put into the context of aging out of the foster care system, these support services could be divided into two categories: 1) *preparation* for adulthood and 2*) ongoing support* throughout adulthood. This, too, demonstrates an emphasis on prevention, as mentioned earlier; services supporting the prevention of mental health crises, incarceration, etc. are also key to supporting aging-out foster youth and their transition into adulthood.

After this overview of the general needs of youth and their families, the authors then described guidelines for child welfare practice, which were created by work groups before being refined by conference participants and a steering committee. These 15 best-practice guidelines fall into two broad categories of *parent engagement* and *youth empowerment,* and are listed and briefly described in the following sections.

I. Parent Engagement Strategies

The eight parent engagement strategies were guided by five assumptions that guided the interpretation of the guidelines. These were that the parent engagement and parent support programs were most effective when 1) nonstigmatizing, 2) research-informed, 3) flexible in delivering a variety of services, 4) cost-efficient, and 5) offered early (which once again emphasized the need for prevention over reactionary intervention). The parent engagement guidelines are as follows:

1. **Use of adult peer family mentors:** Individuals with experience working with different populations should "advocate *with* and assist families in seeking care" (p. 195).
2. **Training for peer family mentors**: Peer family mentors should receive "training, education, and consultation" on mental health issues to help them support families (p. 196).
3. **Agency practices to support parents**: Agencies should ensure that "families experiencing removal of a child receive immediate orientation on their rights and responsibilities" and then periodically reassess (p. 197).
4. **Comprehensive family assessments**: Agencies should conduct a family assessment, working with the family to identify strengths, needs, and supports needed. These are "widely recognized as providing an essential foundation for effective child welfare practice" yet go beyond what is routinely conducted in the initial investigation and service provision process (p. 198).
5. **Family engagement training for child welfare staff**: Agencies should ensure that child welfare staff is trained on how to engage and link families to support.

6. **Referral to substance abuse and MH treatment when needed**: If issues are present for the parent when assessed, agencies will include in the service plan appropriate referral to services "operating in parallel with parenting and family intervention" (p. 199).

7. **Early assistance services for families:** Early help and "differential response services" should be offered to support families in order to "divert them from entering the system" (p. 199), again emphasizing prevention.

8. **Parent involvement in services:** Parents should be encouraged to be involved in their children's mental and physical health processes, from assessment to treatment.

II. Youth Empowerment Guidelines

The authors then listed seven youth empowerment guidelines. These guidelines, similar to the parent peer mentors mentioned above, emphasize the inclusion of youth advocates and the involvement of the youth and their advocates in decision-making. This philosophy, often known by the phrase "nothing about us without us," is essential to youth feeling empowered by having an element of control in their environments (Lejaka, 2019). When populations are involved in decision-making within the systems and organizations that are part of their lives, they are more likely to feel included and valued. This is vital for youth transitioning into adulthood and their sense of agency and competency.

Another fundamental element for this transition is that adolescents understand their supports, rights, and resources, as addressed by guidelines five and six below. A necessity for youth aging out is having support systems *already* in place for when they face challenges. This once again addresses the key theme of prevention over reaction: the guideline of "adequate support for youth aging out of care" (see guideline II.6) elevates the need for youth to be aware of their support systems, *before* the need arises or a crisis occurs. This can be applied to both emotional and mental supports as well as physical supports such as housing or food. In the same way that it is impossible to learn coping skills from the ground up during a crisis, it is similarly impossible for youth to care for themselves in dire situations (both emotionally and physically) without previously having these support systems in place (Rowden, 2021). The youth empowerment guidelines are found below.

1. **Embed youth empowerment into the "missions, values, and practices" of child welfare agencies**: Assessments, planning, and implementation should be strengths-based and focus on involving youth in the processes of each of these domains, with an additional focus on mental health and daily living skills.

2. **Legal advocates for children and youth**: In all legal proceedings, every youth should have a qualified legal advocate with training in mental health and development, informing them of rights and practices. This involvement is necessary for empowerment, but legal proceedings are complex, and youth need this guidance to place them at the forefront of their own journeys, giving them a "sense of control, adding understanding of the process, and providing additional information to the court" (p. 202).

3. **Youth advocate involvement in child welfare agencies**: Agencies should utilize youth and alumni in services planning. This brings to the forefront the theme of "nothing about us without us."

4. **Multicultural competence**: Child welfare agencies must exhibit multicultural competence by providing opportunities for youth empowerment/engagement in "ethnic, cultural and religious activities" (p. 203) and in supporting them as they develop their own identities consistent with the traditions of their families and communities. This is especially vital for youth whose foster or adopted families have different racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds from their own. If youth want to learn more about and develop these aspects of their identity, it is essential for child welfare agencies to support this and provide opportunities for growth and community wherever possible.

5. **Youth understanding of their rights and entitlements:** Child welfare agencies should strive to help youth understand rights, opportunities, entitlements, and more by providing a variety of supports.

6. **Adequate support for youth aging out of care:** There is a large amount of evidence for the impact of adequate resources and support systems on youth as they age out. One study of foster alumni, for example, found that life skills preparation, job training, and college scholarships were all predictive factors of success as adults (Pecora et al., 2003). Another support is extended foster care services; one study demonstrated that youth remaining in state custody for an additional year after age 18 are more likely to "advance their education, have stable housing, stay out of the juvenile justice system", and more (Courtney et al., 2005, as cited in Romanelli et al., 2009, p. 204). Other supports include access to healthcare and insurance, housing, and "strong, stable relationships," especially with a caring adult (p. 204).

7. **Accountability for youth empowerment outcomes:** Child welfare agencies should remain accountable for measurable outcomes related to youth empowerment when gathering data.

Discussion

In addition to the above guidelines for both parents and youth empowerment, Romanelli and her colleagues emphasize that programs promoting youth empowerment should remain available for youth until age 21, not solely until age 18. They recognize that this may take legislative support and "close collaboration" between agencies and community organizations (p. 206) but accentuate how access to resources and support systems during this period is a key player in adult health and success.

One element that could be added to these guidelines is the idea of supporting parental cultural humility. The article mentioned the importance of child welfare agencies exhibiting multicultural competence (see II.4 above) by providing opportunities for youth to engage in their own cultural activities. However, a similar "parent engagement strategy" (like those in section I) would be for child welfare agencies to provide opportunities for foster parents and guardians to grow in cultural humility. This could be achieved by inviting speakers to foster parents' support meetings, providing agency-hosted webinars, and simply encouraging foster parents to conduct research and internal work. As many foster youth aging out of the system may be surrounded by adults of backgrounds and traditions different from their own, it is important for the adults to understand and be aware of these differences. Caseworkers, mentors, and other adults in adolescents' lives can similarly strive for cultural humility.

Overall, the guidelines mentioned in this article provide relevant and comprehensive recommendations for youth aging out of care. By striving to follow these guidelines, agencies offer not only the most effective care for those under age 18, but also prepare them for later success. In a society focused heavily on independence, adolescents transitioning to adulthood need to know that they are cared for, supported, and empowered.

References

Kaplan, S. J., Skolnik, L., and Turnbull, A. (2009). Enhancing the empowerment of youth in foster care: Supportive services. Child Welfare, 88(1). https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=txshracd2588&id=GALE|A218882782&v=2.1&it=r

Keefe, R. J., Cummings, A., Van Horne, B., & Greeley, C. (2021). A comparison study of mental health diagnoses of foster and non-foster children on Medicaid. *Pediatrics*, *147*, 83–84. DOI: 10.1542/peds.147.3MA1.83

Lejaka, T. (2019, June 5). Nothing about boxing SA without boxing SA. City Press. https://www.news24.com/citypress/sport/nothing-about-boxing-sa-without-boxing-sa-20190601. Keefe, R. J., Cummings, A., Van Horne, B., & Greeley, C. (2021). A comparison study of mental

health diagnoses of foster and non-foster children on medicaid. *Pediatrics*, *147*, 83–84. DOI:
10.1542/peds.147.3MA1.83

Pecora, P. J., Williams, M. S., Kessler, C., Downs, A. C., O'Brien, K., Hiripi, E., & Morello, S. (2003).
Assessing the effects of foster care: Early results from the Casey National Alumni Study. Casey
Family Programs. https://www.casey.org/media/AlumniStudy_US_Report_Full.pdf.

Perkins, D. D., & Zimmerman, M. A. (1995). Empowerment theory, research, and application. *American
Journal of Community Psychology, 23,* 569-579.

Rowden, A. (2021, April 19). What to know about amygdala hijack.
https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/amygdala-hijack#what-is-it

Resources for Children and Families

The Annie E. Casey Foundation – Child Welfare Resources
The Annie E. Casey Foundation's website contains an abundance of resources and initiatives striving to help children grow up in families and get the help they need to heal, build lasting family relationships, and reach their full potential.*

Child Welfare Information Gateway
An important aspect of child welfare work is the engagement of youth and teen voices who have experienced the adoption and foster care system. The Child Welfare Information Gateway provides an avenue for incorporating these voices and perspectives into professional discussion.
- Resources for Child Welfare Professionals

Kinship Navigator Programs
There are three Kinship Navigator Programs within the clearinghouse that look supportive and promising. To learn more about the programs, go to the link above and filter by program or service area by clicking on "kinship navigator."

National Foster Parent Association - Resources
The NFPA hosts an extensive resources page featuring information on fostering, kinship, legal rights, services, trainings, and much more.

The Riverside Project
The Riverside Project is a collaborative network of agencies, congregations, nonprofits, school districts, and passionate individuals working together to transform the foster care system in Houston, TX.

Circle of Security Training & Resources for Parents
The Circle of Security is a visual map which helps promote secure attachment between children and their caregivers. Circle of Security International focuses on training providers with many different backgrounds and from many different disciplines and providing attachment resources for caregivers.

*Many of the descriptions on this page and pages 19-22 are taken directly from each organization's website.

Resources for Adolescents in the Child Welfare System

This issue highlighted many aspects surrounding the process of aging out of the child welfare system, including how vital it is to have resources and a support system during this time. As this online journal is published by the University of Houston, the resources below are categorized into both local and national agencies serving teens who will soon be aging out of care.

Houston, TX Resources:

211 Texas/United Way Helpline

A free, confidential helpline operated by United Way of Greater Houston, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, the 211Texas/United Way HELPLINE connected more than 1.2 million of our neighbors with help in 2022. Top calls were for utility assistance, rent and mortgage assistance, housing, public benefits assistance, and food assistance.

AccessHealth

AccessHealth is a private, not-for-profit organization and Federally Qualified Health Center focusing on providing primary healthcare services for the low-income population of Fort Bend and Waller counties, but opens its doors to all who wish to receive care without regard to income or circumstance.

Angel Reach

Angel Reach is a faith-based nonprofit that helps teens and young adults through employment assistance, education advising, counseling, mentoring, tutoring, support groups, and more.

BridgeYear and MorePathways by BridgeYear

BridgeYear is offers "career test drives" in which students can get hands-on experience to see if a job is right for them, as well as a 1:1 comprehensive advising program. They additionally host an online database to search for jobs in the Houston area that either a) require less than a 4-year degree, or b) have a training program.

Eight Million Stories (8MS)

Eight Million Stories works to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline by providing disconnected youth/young adults (those who have been pushed out of our school system or are involved with the justice system) with an opportunity to complete their education and obtain meaningful employment, to successfully transition into adulthood and become self-sufficient.

The Harris Center

The Harris Center for Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) strives to provide high-quality, efficient, and cost-effective services so that persons with behavioral health and developmental needs may live with dignity as fully functioning, participating, and contributing members of the community.

- 24/7 CRISIS LINE: 866-970-4770

Houston Angels

The Houston Angels mission is to walk alongside children, youth, and families in the foster care community by offering consistent support through intentional giving, relationship building, and mentorship.

Houston PEARLS Foundation

The Houston PEARLS Foundation supports youth in foster care, ages 14-18, through community mentoring and resources. They strive to provide a support system that teaches life skills, preparing youth for adulthood and real-world challenges. We do this by facilitating the building of relationships with caring mentors and holding bi-monthly community-building program nights.

Legacy Community Health

Legacy Community Health is a full-service health care system comprised of over 50 locations in the Texas Gulf Coast region offering adult and senior primary care, pediatrics, OB/GYN, behavioral health, dental, HIV/AIDS care, vision, specialty care, and pharmacy services. As the largest Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in Texas and a United Way affiliated agency since 1990, Legacy ensures its services and programs are open to all, regardless of the ability to pay—without judgment or exception.

Legacy Community Health TeenWell Program

Legacy TeenWell™ helps provide teens and young adults with the information, resources, and answers they need to become self-reliant in managing their own healthcare.

Texas Foster Youth Justice Project

The TFYJP educates former and current foster youth in TX about their legal rights, and provides the public with information regarding foster youth's needs and concerns.

Texas Foster Youth Justice Project - Aging Out of Foster Care in Texas: What You Need to Know

This link leads to one-page bifold handouts in both Spanish and English that simply explain what aging out of foster care means, why the details are important to know, and the benefits and services that aged-out foster youth are entitled to.

National Resources:

National Foster Youth Institute

NFYI aims to transform the child welfare system by building a national grassroots movement led by foster youth and their families.

National Mentoring Resource Center

Launched in January 2014, the National Mentoring Resource Center is a comprehensive and reliable resource for mentoring tools, program and training materials, as well as access to no-cost training and technical assistance.

Mentoring.org - Foster Care Resources

Mentoring.org's "Engaging Youth In Foster Care" page lists abundant resources, blog posts, research on mentoring foster youth, and programs around the US.

Resources for Indigenous and Native College Students

There is a multitude of challenges facing students attempting to further their education. Still, there are Indigenous and Native American college students who meet a particular set of representation and face financial, mental health, and mentorship challenges. The following is a compilation of resources designed to bridge the gap and make college entrance and success more attainable for Indigenous and Native students.

College Guide for Indigenous and Native American Students
This guide is put together by Best Colleges, and it organizes resources supporting Indigenous learners.

Bureau of Indian Education
The BIE has information on schools, college preparatory courses, and education events.

National Indian Education Association
The NIEA works to advance culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.

American Indian College Fund
There are many scholarship opportunities available. The AICF has a scholarship application open to any full-time student Native American citizen who is a member or descendant of a state or federally-recognized tribe with at least a 2.0 grade point average.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The *Child and Family Journal of Innovative Practice and Research* (CFJ) aims to build a platform for sharing innovative ideas in child and family welfare. We invite both scholars and practitioners to submit manuscripts, practice notes, case studies, teaching/educational notes, stories, personal or professional reflections, and other innovative works that share clinical experiences in child and family services. The CFJ loves to hear experiences from the field to share with the audience to advocate for our clients, clinicians, workers, and families.

Upcoming issues will center around the following topics:

Volume IV, Issue 2: **Privatization of child welfare.** Previous CFJ issues have examined the Children Without Placement (CWOP) issues in Texas. Continuing this theme, the CFJ would like to examine the impact of the privatization of child welfare practices on children and families throughout the country. A hope for this issue is to include many aspects of this complex topic. Suggested topics include but are not limited to:
- Experiences of children and families through the privatization process
- Impact of this transition on child welfare workers
- Experiences of public child welfare workers working with children without placement
- Works from policy professionals advocating for the protection of children without placement during these transitions
- Pieces from workers in states that have already transitioned to privatization and what they are learning

Volume V, Issue 1: **Impact of secondary trauma.** We invite anyone interested in this topic to share their stories, specifically child welfare employees or clinicians who have experienced the effects of secondary trauma, alongside professionals who have an academic viewpoint. Suggested topics include but are not limited to:
- Differentiating between secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout
- Healthy ways to process and cope with secondary trauma
- A review of the literature surrounding the physiological effects of secondary trauma on social workers
- How child welfare agencies can support both their clients and employees

We invite short articles (within 1-3 single-spaced pages) involving the above topics to be submitted for future issues. To be given priority for **Volume IV, Issue 2**, please submit articles and content by **April 15, 2024.**

The *Submission Guidelines for Authors* are here or on the journal webpage.