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Supporting Foster Youth in Their Transition into Adulthood: A Multi-Tiered Approach for School

Based Practice

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Author Note

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Abstract

When foster youth age out of the system, they are often left unprepared and with little to no resources. Due to lack of support, this population is extremely vulnerable to poor outcomes such as homelessness, substance abuse, unplanned pregnancy, and mental health issues. Because youth spend a majority of time in school, school psychologists can play a pivotal role in shaping the futures of transitioning foster youth. A review of the literature gives support for preventative programs to support transitioning foster youth. This paper looks at the various interventions we can provide within school-based practice using a multi-tiered systems of support model.

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Each year, over 20,000 U.S. youth age out of the foster care system, essentially losing all of their support overnight (Fowler, Marcal, Zhang, Day, and Landsverk, 2017). These abrupt changes make the transition into adulthood extremely complex for foster youth. Jones (2012) suggests that during their transition, former foster youth face many problems in education, employment, housing and homelessness, health and mental health, substance abuse, and criminal involvement. After collecting qualitative data on three former foster youth, it was found that this transition is especially difficult for this vulnerable population. Havelick (2011) suggests that factors such as multiple placements, childhood trauma, poor mental health, and substance abuse put some foster youth more at risk than others, indicating that these young adults may require stronger supports during their transition. These compounding risk factors make foster youth more likely to exit the care system without adequate resources or long-term support. Blakeslee (2012) recognizes the transition of foster youth from child welfare services as a “phenomenon of international relevance” (p.326).

In comparison to their fostered peers, census data indicates that youth in the general population are leaving their parents homes around age 23 and are often returning home after an initial stalled attempt at living independently. The average age that American children finally depart the home is 28 (Jones, 2012). Currently, foster youth are discharged from the system at age 21, while a majority of foster youth chose to leave the system between the ages of 17 and 19. Research suggests that being discharged with little support and at a young age may be one of the reasons foster youth struggle during this transition in comparison to the general population

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(Jones, 2012). Foster youth do not have the advantage of a gradual transition into adulthood or the safety net of family to help navigate the unfamiliar challenges of independent living (Blakeslee, 2012).

This is not to say that all foster youth experience a difficult transition. Many youth with consistent and comprehensive support transition into stable housing, continuing education, and financial security (Blakeslee, 2012). Richardson and Yates (2014) found that foster youth with educational competence, occupational adjustment, good housing quality, and relationships with peers, partners, and one's community are likely to adjust better to independent living. Further, Jones (2012) found that foster youth who exited care at an older age, were more resilient than care leavers who were younger. The researchers suggest that older youth may have done better than young participants because they continued to receive services while in residence or had gained some maturity due to the later exit. This paper explores the ways in which our school communities are cultivating these protective factors through currently available programs for foster youth during their transition out of care. It is important for tiered support systems to be in place so that schools can ease these young adults transition into adulthood.

Risk Factors

Placement instability is one of the many risk factors effecting foster youth and their transition into adulthood. According to Storer et al. (2014), foster youth reside in an average of three placements before aging out of the system. However, number of placement changes can range from a low of two to a high of 10 placements. Havelick (2011) found that foster youth who have experienced five or more placement changes experience poorest outcomes when transitioning into adulthood and were six times more likely than their peers to receive mental

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health services. This suggests that this population may have higher rates of emotional instability and mental illness. Furthermore, adolescents with three or more placement changes were significantly more likely to be arrested during their transition into adulthood. A number of studies have also found a positive association between placement instability and behavior problems. As noted by Fischer et al. (2011), behavioral disinhibition, which includes disregard for social conventions, impulsivity, and poor risk assessment, has been found to be more likely among former foster youth who have experienced high levels of placement instability early in development.

A growing body of research also links aging out with housing problems. Emerging adults in the general population often rely on their parents to provide housing at some point in young adulthood. Foster youth do not typically have this safety net which results in financial struggles such as struggling to pay rent on time or getting behind on utility payments (Fowler et al., 2017). A 2-year follow-up study done by Fowler and colleagues (2017) found that one fifth of former foster youth in a large metropolitan area were inadequately housed, and 30% of former foster youth have experienced at least one night of homelessness. Federal policies have attempted to address the homelessness problem by implementing programs aimed at preparing youth for independent living through education training, employment, and finance training. However, the type and quality of these programs vary across the country.

Poor mental health is another risk factor effecting foster youth. A study on adult foster youth living in the Midwest found that former foster youth were twice as likely to receive counseling and mental health services than those of a nationally represented sample. These individuals were also more likely to have been engaged in substance abuse, another risk factor

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effecting transitioning youth (Shook et al, 2011). Sakai et al. (2014) addressed foster youths seemingly negative views about mental health in their study. In this study, foster youth expressed that they had been treated for mental health services while in care when they perceived themselves not to have a problem in the first place. According to these youth, their lack of control over treatment options lead them to avoid seeking mental health services after care. These youth also report a loss of support and preparation for how to find and utilize mental health services after transitioning (Sakai et al., 2014).

Federal Policies

Multiple federal policies have been put in place to support transitioning foster youth. One argument is that transitioning foster youth are simultaneously encountering two distinct changes: leaving the system and transitioning from a child to an adult (Vaughn, 2008). Blakeslee (2012) argues that foster youth need as much, if not more, personalized support and accessible resources as other adolescents transitioning through emerging adulthood and into their 20's. To address the developmental changes that come along with becoming an adult, as well as the chaos that happens when support is discontinued, policy makers have extended the age from which foster youth leave care from 18 to 21. This is referred to as the Fostering Connections to Success Act (2008) (Kirk & Day, 2011). Under this act, funding is increased so that states can provide support and care to youth in foster care up until the age of 21. It is interesting to note that this program only supports transitioning foster youth who have earned a high school diploma or equivalent and are pursuing postsecondary education. This act also requires that each foster youth make a transition plan with their case worker, 90 days prior to aging out. These transition plans must include housing, mental health services, insurance, education, available community services, and

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employment services (Cooper, Jordan, & McCoy, 2013). Extending care has been associated with postsecondary educational attainment, decreased arrests, delayed pregnancy, and more stable housing for these individuals (Lee, Courtney, & Tajima, 2014).

Macomber et al. (2008) recommends that programs and transition plans be tailored to each individual's needs. For example, youth with the desire to work early on may require additional support in obtaining long term work. On the other hand, youth who are pursuing postsecondary education, may require a transition plan that provides extra support while they finish school. The Chafee National Youth in Transition Database is a great resource for servicing transitioning youth with unique needs.

Federal Programs

The Chafee Foster Care Independence program provides funding for independent living programs for transitioning foster youth (Richards, 2014). Other federally funded housing programs include the St. Petersburg Housing Authority, Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority, and The Oregon Trail Youth Project in which aging-out youth are guaranteed a structured living arrangement for up to one year. The issue is that foster youth are often unaware of the programs that are available to them or lack the resources to apply for programs (Macomber et al., 2008).

Although extended care is associated with positive outcomes, many foster youth chose to leave the system as early as possible. According to McCoy, McMillan, and Spitznagel (2008) foster youth left the system between ages 17-19 because they were "tired of the system" and "wanted to be treated like adults". The researchers suggest that providing young adults with a greater voice and decision-making authority, may increase their likelihood of staying in care.

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Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Multi-tiered systems of support models are currently being implemented in schools to promote early identification and intervention. Eagle, Dowd-Eagle, Snyder, and Holtzman (2015) define the MTSS model as “an evidence-based model of education that employs data-based problem-solving techniques to integrate academic and behavioral instruction and intervention” (p.161). This multi-tiered model is geared toward preventing problems before they significantly impact the lives of at-risk youth.

There is strong evidence for the need of multi-dimensional support and resources for foster youth in their transition out of the system (Blakeslee, 2012). Tier one provides universal support and interventions for students. Tier one interventions are proactive, preventative, and apply to students who need only core interventions. In this case, tier one strategies would be targeted towards all fostered youth. Tier two supports are targeted group interventions designed for students who are not responding to tier one supports. Tier two interventions support at-risk students and are typically short-term interventions with moderate intensity. Research suggests that foster youth needing tier two supports may have had multiple placements, or mental health related issues (Havelick, 2012). Tier three interventions are chronic and intensive supports aimed at students who are at the highest risk for poor outcomes. Tier three interventions are long term and of high intensity. This may include foster youth who have experienced childhood trauma, have a history of arrests, or are pregnant (Havelick, 2011).

Methods

A search of the literature was conducted in order to gather information about foster youth’s transition out of care and the current support programs available for this population.

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Research was collected utilizing the EBSCOhost and ProQUEST databases through the Chapman University Library website. The frequent keyword used in the search included: “resiliency in foster youth”, “foster youth and transition out of care”, “foster youth in adulthood”, and “Foster youth and multi-tiered supports”. Advanced search preferences were narrowed to a 10-year period (2007-2017) as well as full text articles and peer reviewed articles (only). The literature will be organized based on where the research fits in a three-tiered model of support. Research for some of the current interventions being used by local schools was found at the Orange County Department of Education foster youth district liaison meeting on March 2, 2018.

Tier 1

Although there is not much school workers can do to prevent children from being in foster care, there are certain measures they can take to ease their transition out of the system and obtain better outcomes. Tier one or primary prevention strategies support all of the foster youth in a school’s population. Staff training on the unique needs of foster students, mental health awareness, and college preparedness are some of the interventions that help support this population as they transition.

Staff training and awareness

Foster youth often come from unstable living situations, forcing them to transfer schools periodically. These school changes lead to a disruption in connections to peers and school professionals, enrollment delays and grade level repetitions, and an over representation of foster youth in special education (Day, Somers, Darden, and Yoon, 2014)). In their study, Day, Somers, Darden and Yoon (2014) set out to find how well school psychologists, school counselors, and

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school social workers are collaborating to support the needs of foster youth in schools. Results indicated that only 50% of participants were aware of the foster children on their caseloads. Furthermore, these school workers admitted having limited connections with outside agencies and taking little initiative in reaching out to communicate and collaborate with community-based agencies outside the school. One step toward providing equal education opportunities for our foster youth is to bridge the gaps in communication between welfare workers and school professionals such as school psychologists and school counselors.

The conclusions of this study have many practical implications within the field of School psychology. Such implications might address how we can improve our education and community systems to better support foster youth while setting them up for academic success. With the appropriate support, Strolin, Woodhouse, Suter, and Werrbach (2016) argue that being in a school provides opportunities for foster youth to build protective factors that may counter trauma-related challenges through academic success, building competencies, forming social connections, and starting on a path towards a successful transition into adulthood. Providing staff training and awareness to school workers, may encourage school psychologists to learn more about the foster youth on their caseloads and foster more collaboration between themselves and community-based agencies. Further, Malvaso, Delfabbro, Hackett, & Mills, (2016) notes that many foster youth are not aware of the services available to them post-transition. It is the job of school psychologists to educate themselves on available programs and share that information with the foster youth on their caseloads.

One program that may address some issues of staff training and awareness of foster youth is the CARES (Culturally Affirmative Responsive Education Specialist) program. This program

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is a graduate training grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education aimed at addressing the shortages of highly qualified professionals to meet the unique needs of foster youth. Through specialized training practices, school workers are taught how to appropriately respond to the needs of this population, especially those who are at risk. Not only does this program increase staff training and awareness of foster youth but also improves the gaps in communication between school workers and community programs (Green & Mathiesen, 2016).

Intervention counselors: Alternatives to suspension mental health classrooms

According to Higgins and Tyler (2017), at-home suspension practices disproportionately affect minority students, including fostered and homeless youth. At home suspensions typically result in poor outcomes for students, teachers, and administrators. Some schools use an alternative to suspension (ATS) model in which a child is placed in an ATS classroom. During this time, students receive the educational services that they would be missing had they been sent home for suspension. Typically, these classes are staffed with general education teachers, however, a local school district has put a unique twist on their ATS program to assist transitioning fostered and homeless youth.

Saddleback Unified School District provides tier one support to foster youth and homeless youth with the use of intervention counselors. They staff their ATS classrooms with intervention counselors who specialize in counseling, mental health awareness, and intervention (Orange County Department of Education, 2018). In one study, foster youth reported a lack of skills to navigate the mental health system as well as a limited understanding of their mental

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health diagnosis and treatment plans. Mental health professionals can empower youth to build their understanding of and assess their own mental health and understand the risks and benefits of treatment (Sakai et al., 2014). Providing mental health services to these vulnerable students could increase their mental stability so that they can transition with the coping skills and resources necessary to better their futures.

Postsecondary Education Support

Gainful employment is one factor associated with greater outcomes as well as lower rates of delinquency and arrests in transitioning foster youth (Vaughn, 2008). One way to obtain gainful employment is through the consideration of attending postsecondary education. Postsecondary education refers to continuing education after high school such as trade school, community college, or attending a four-year university. In 2005, 25 to 34-year olds who had at least a bachelor's degree earned on average 61% more than those with only a high school diploma; over 10 years later, it is assumed that percentage is even higher. (Courtney, Dworsky, and Peters, 2009). Kirk and Day (2011) suggest that access to post-secondary education is often key to the future success of at risk youth. Unfortunately, due to lack of support, this is an option that many foster youth see as unattainable. Programs such as the Foster Youth Success Initiative, NextUP, and Upward Bound are all designated to empowering and supporting foster youth to continue on to postsecondary education.

The Foster Youth Success Initiative (FYSI) and NextUP are California College Pathways programs that support foster youth once they have transitioned into a community college. As part

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of the FYSI, every community college campus in California has a designated foster youth liaison who is responsible for helping foster youth to set goals, complete programs, transfer, and attain degree certificates. In addition, this program provides support for accessing financial aid, scholarships, student services, and resources (CA College Pathways, 2015).

NextUP is also funded by the California College Pathways program. This initiative has partnered with several community college campuses across California to support educationally disadvantaged foster youth. NextUP services include counseling, book and supply grants, tutoring, independent living and financial literacy workshops, career guidance, transfer counseling, child care, transportation, mental health services, housing assistance, and other related services. To qualify for the NextUP program, students must be under the age of 26, in foster care on or after their 16th birthday, and enrolled in at least 9 units at a community college with a NextUP program. Although these programs are not aimed specifically at high school students, raising student's awareness of the support programs available at local community colleges could have positive implications for their post-secondary education attainment goals (CA College Pathways, 2015).

Upward Bound is funded by the US Department of Education to serve students who are struggling financially, such as foster and homeless youth. Upward Bound is recommended by the National Association of School Psychology (NASP) as one of the programs designed to provide improved access to post-secondary education for students who are underrepresented in higher education such as foster youth (Scherr, 2015). The program is set up for these students to succeed academically in high school as well as their post-secondary education pursuits. Upward Bound projects provide additional academic instruction in mathematics, laboratory sciences,

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composition, literature, and foreign languages. Additional services include tutoring, work-study programs, and education or counseling services designed to improve the financial and economic literacy of students.

The Senior Project

Orange Unified School District implements a program called The Senior Project. The goal of this program is to increase graduation rates of foster youth as well as encourage them toward college. First, all students who are not on track to graduate will meet with a counselor to come up with a plan. For students who don't wish to graduate, this plan might include career counseling and assessment, however, counselors encourage graduation. The program coordinator also has speakers come from local community colleges to inform these students of the benefits of attending college. If students wish to pursue post-secondary education, they can receive help with their application as well as submitting their FASFA and obtaining letters of recommendation for applications and scholarships.

The final goal of this program is to increase foster youth's participation in senior activities such as prom and senior night. Because these events cost money, often times foster youth are not able to participate. The Senior Project fundraises throughout the year so that these students are able to participate with their peers. In 2017, all foster youth graduated from El Modena and Orange High School. The program coordinator believes this is due to the success of The Senior Project (Orange County Department of Education, 2018).

In a study on foster youth who pursued postsecondary education, students reported feeling confident in their intellectual abilities and their love for learning, but still expressed the heavy emotional barriers that they felt prevented them from success in high school (Neal, 2017).

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By acknowledging these barriers for students in high school, and supporting them when they are faced with challenges, school psychologists may be better able to encourage foster youth to go on to college. In addition, providing information about the supports available to students in college, could help them to obtain their goals of postsecondary education. NASP suggests that school psychologists can collaborate with guidance counselors and other school workers to prepare this group for graduation and post-secondary education. Some of these suggestions include working to find what local programs are available and encouraging students in foster care to pursue a college education and helping them obtain admissions (Scherr, 2015)).

Tier 2

Factors such as childhood trauma, multiple placements, poor mental health, and substance abuse put some foster youth more at risk than others. These young adults may require stronger tertiary supports during their transition (Havelick, 2011). In a study by Tyrell and Yates (2017), foster youth childhood maltreatment experience and out-of-home placement history showed a negative correlation with their housing quality two years following emancipation. This means that the more maltreatment and placement instability experienced by the child, the more likely the child would be to have poor housing quality after their transition out of the system. Lastly, Mendez, Johnson, and Moslehuddin (2010), advised that all foster youth should be supported during their transition out of care, however, those with substance abuse, behavior problems, and poor mental health should require additional support. Research suggests that

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mentorship programs, independent living skills groups, and tutor programs could help ease the transition of those youth not responding to tier one interventions.

Mentor Programs

According to Strolin, Woodhouse, Suter, and Werrbach (2016) stability and positive relationships with adult mentor's eases transition, leading to more positive outcomes for foster youth.

Furthermore, on a study of foster youth who attended post-secondary education, all participants credited teachers and other adult mentors who expected them to do well academically but also provided a safe and nurturing space for these students (Neal, 2017). According to the aforementioned studies and many others, mentoring programs continue to gain support as one of the best practices for improving the well-being of at-risk youth (Thompson, 2015).

Orange Unified School District (OUSD) offers mentor programs at a few local high schools. In the Connections Mentor Programs, general education teachers who are interested in being mentors can volunteer to mentor up to five foster youth. All volunteers are required to attend trauma informed trainings, so that they can offer constructive support to these particularly vulnerable students. In return, these teachers are paid time and a half for meeting with students individually for a minimum of one hour per month (Orange County Department of Education, 2018). To be a part of this program, teachers have to commit for at least one year, with hopes to maintain a stable relationship with youth who are often lacking relationship stability. Research suggests that the dosage and length of mentoring programs have a significant impact on outcomes. For example, Johnson, Price, and Martinovich (2011) found that at risk youth involved in mentor relationships longer than 12 months had increases in measures on self-worth, socialization, and academics. Although this program is available to all foster youth attending

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OUSD schools, research suggests that limited attachments to supportive adults makes those foster youth more at risk than others (Blakeslee, 2012).Provi

In addition to individual meetings, the mentor program has a monthly breakfast club in which all mentors and students involved meet before school to have breakfast together. This is one way to get these students off to a good start in the morning. According to the program coordinator, students involved in the mentoring program have also become quite close and watch out for one another on campus. Further, some seniors in the program have provided peer mentorship to freshman and younger foster youth on campus.

The Connections Mentor program not only provides a safe space for these students, but also encourages them to build connections on campus. A big focus of this program is helping foster youth to identify any extracurricular they might be interested in and encouraging them to get involved. When interest in an extracurricular is expressed, the mentor will introduce the student to the appropriate school personnel and help them to get started in that activity. This includes coordinating schedules with coaches, helping to fill out paper work, and working with outside services to get any gear or supplies that the student might need to participate in the program. Since the beginning of this mentor program, foster youth's participation in extracurricular has increased exponentially (Orange County Department of Education, 2018).

Tutor Program

Capistrano Unified School District offers a tutor program for foster youth who are struggling academically. Although, they hope for this to grow into a primary intervention, they have only been given enough funding to support a handful of students. Funding to implement

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these types of programs continues to be a challenge for schools. Within this program, foster youth who are at risk for failing are connected with a trained tutor who can meet with them at home or at a local library. This is a small and fairly new program, so outcomes have not yet been evaluated (Orange County Department of Education, 2018).

Independent living skills group

Young adults who have exited care, especially those with complex needs, sometimes lack the life skills necessary for independent living. In a study by Malvaso, Delfabbro, Hackett, and Mills (2016), former foster youth spoke about the challenges that arose because they felt they did not have the skills necessary to cope with independent living such as budgeting, cooking, and cleaning. One participant said, “There are financial issues... it is quite difficult for any 16-year-old to budget but having the added pressure of living on your own and having to budget for rent and bills, then it becomes really difficult.”(p.135) In a study on resiliency in former foster youth Jones (2012) found that the acquisition of independent living skills was positively associated with resiliency. To prepare at-risk foster youth for transition, federal policy focuses on programs that train independent living skills, however, no programs are currently being implemented in schools (Fowler et al., 2017).

One tool that may be helpful for those running an independent living skills group is the Casey Life Skills Assessment. This is a free tool that helps determine foster youth’s strengths as well as the challenges they may face during transition. This tool is often used by social workers to assess youths’ readiness for independent living (McCoy, McMillen, & Spitznagel, 2008). The CLS has measures for maintaining healthy relationships, work and study habits, planning and goal setting, using community resources, daily living activities, budgeting and paying bills,

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computer literacy, and permanent connections to peers and adults. After completing the CLS an educator, mentor, or case worker can use this information to form appropriate goals for transition with the student (Casey Life Skills, 2017).

School psychologists are in a great position to advocate for transitioning foster youth by making sure they receive independent living services to prepare them for adult life. NASP recommends that school psychologists should be in contact with child protection case workers to make sure their students are receiving any local services that are available to them. In fact, Nasp claims that “it is imperative that child welfare and education professionals collaborate and coordinate the development of independent living and transition services” (p.64). Additionally, NASP suggests that education planning is one of the most frequently taught independent living skills; however, financial skills, employment training, and how to search for a secure housing should also be included in life skills training (Scherr, 2015).

Tier 3

Malvaso, Delfabro, Hackett, and Mills (2016) identify transitioning foster youth at highest risk to be those with complex needs and those who are disengaged or highly resistant to receiving any formal help. These students may be particularly challenging to work with, though they are the ones needing support most. Furthermore, Havelick (2011) suggests that foster youth at highest risk after transitioning may have experienced childhood trauma, multiple arrests, or be pregnant. Specialized mental health counselors, job training, and wraparound support systems may be most beneficial for these students.

Intervention counselors: 1 to 1 setting

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Researchers have identified foster youth with complex needs such as conduct problems and poor mental health to be more at risk for poor outcomes when leaving care (Malvaso, Delfabro, Hackett, & Mills, 2016). In addition to filling their ATS classrooms with intervention counselors Saddleback Unified School District has made these counselors available for individual mental health counseling services for all McKinney Vento and foster youth (Orange County Department of Education, 2018). Because students transitioning out of foster care exhibit elevated rates of dropout, these specialized counselors are also trained to provide graduation checks and case management support for these youth (King and Kamaa, 2013).

Job Corps

According to Havelick (2012) only one third of foster youth are employed during and after their exit from the child welfare system. Not having a job or consistent income is one of the major risk factors leading to poor outcomes for transitioning foster youth. Job Corps is a national workforce readiness program for disadvantaged youth. This military style camp is intended to help disadvantaged youth become more responsible, enjoyable, and productive citizens. Agencies recruit for Job Corps by providing information about the program in disadvantaged communities. Once recruited, students are sent to a job corps training center for anywhere from eight months to two years. While at the centers, students receive vocational training, which is offered in more than 75 trades, academic instruction, social skills training, and mental health education and counseling. In a study on the effectiveness of the Job corps program, it was found that participation increases educational attainment, reduces criminal activity, and increases yearly earnings for participants (Schochet, Burghardt, & McConnell, 2008). Although there have not

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been studies on the effectiveness of Job Corps on transitioning foster youth specifically, research suggests positive outcomes for disadvantaged youth who graduate from this program.

Job Corps is listed by NASP as one of the effective vocational training opportunities for transitioning foster youth. School Psychologists can work with guidance counselors to plan and consider getting students involved in programs such as Job Corps, that are federal vocational and college preparation courses (Scherr, 2015)).

Wraparound services

Because of past experience, many foster youth believe that reliance upon others is risky (Morton, 2017). This leads to a mindset that researchers call “survivalist self-reliance”. Although self-reliance can be thought of as a positive thing, it can also create a situation in which a foster youth desperately needs help but cannot ask for it (Morton, 2017). The self-reliance mind set is one reason that these students could benefit from the support of wraparound services.

Wraparound services are typically reserved for students with complex emotional and behavioral needs. That being said, some of our highest risk foster youth may also be able to benefit from this type of intervention. Eber, Hyde, and Suter (2010) refer to wraparound services as “a team based collaborative process for developing care plans for at risk youth and their families.” (p.783). The first step in wraparound services is engagement and team development. For foster youth this may require active involvement of their foster parents, other guardians, mentors, or outside service providers. In the second step, plan development, these team members collaborate with school workers and the students to come up with a plan that leads to realistic and practical strategies to support the student in his or her home, school, and community (Eber, Hyde, & Suter, 2010). For transitioning foster youth, wraparound services might look like a team

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collaboration to make a plan to find stable housing, employment, education, and ongoing services after leaving care (Blakeslee, 2012).

Discussion

The transition into adulthood is complex for foster youth. These students often experience discouraging outcomes due to lack of support and resources. Because schools play such a large role in the lives of students, school psychologists are especially vital for coming up with ways to support these students during their transition. By implementing support using an MTSS model, all transitioning foster youth should be able to have their needs met based on each student's individual circumstances.

In a study by Miller, Paschas, and Azar (2017) resilient former foster youth had no risk indicators, were enrolled in school, and were connected to a supportive and caring adult. In addition, youth who were taking advantage of the supports offered by the system fared to have better outcomes post transitions. In this study resilience was defined as having stable housing, good employment, and positive educational outcomes after leaving care. As school psychologists we can increase these outcomes by providing safe and welcoming school climates.

The biggest primary intervention is to increase collaboration between schools and other service providers so that school workers can connect our students to the services they are entitled to. It is vital that school psychologists are aware of the foster youth on their caseloads. Increasing accountability of school workers, helps to ensure that these students aren't falling between the cracks. In addition, school psychologists should be aware of community resources available for transitioning foster youth as well as be in contact with social welfare agencies and case workers.

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When leaders within our schools and communities collaborate effectively, foster youth can feel safe and supported during their transitions.

Next, providing mental health counseling and awareness to these students helps to increase their chances of mental wellness post transition. Finally, foster youth who receive post-secondary education, fare better than their peers who do not. By increasing awareness of college access and available support for foster youth, school psychologists can increase the chances of these students reaching their post-secondary goals, thus leading to better outcomes.

At the secondary level, there is growing research to support the use of mentors with disadvantaged youth. As school leaders, not only can school psychologists develop mentor programs within our schools, but they can also serve as good role models and mentors naturally.

Because transitioning foster youth do not have a parental safety net, they have a hard time obtaining the life skills necessary for independent living. Implementing life skills training programs within schools, may lead to this population being more prepared for their transition. Finally, group tutor programs can help struggling students to graduate and maybe even continue on to post-secondary education. Tutor programs also offer the opportunity for mentorship and support.

For transitioning foster youth at the highest risk, individualized counseling, job support, and wraparound services have been shown to lead to better outcomes. By being advocates for foster youth, school psychologists can help create a supportive environment for transitioning foster youth. Through reminding school personnel of their ethical and legal obligations to support all students, school psychologists can create a school climate that sets all foster youth to thrive, even after graduation and into their adult years.

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