



Fostering Higher Education: A postsecondary access and retention intervention for youth with foster care experience



Amy M. Salazar^{a,*}, Kevin P. Haggerty^b, Stephanie S. Roe^b

^a Department of Human Development, Washington State University, 14204 Salmon Creek Ave., Vancouver, WA 98686-9600, USA

^b Social Development Research Group, School of Social Work, University of Washington, 9725 3rd Ave. NE, Suite 401, Seattle, WA 98115, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 July 2016

Received in revised form 6 September 2016

Accepted 7 September 2016

Available online 09 September 2016

Keywords:

Foster care

Child welfare

Higher education

Postsecondary

Intervention development

Substance abuse prevention

Mentoring

Educational advocacy

ABSTRACT

Most youth in foster care aspire to obtain higher education, but face daunting obstacles in doing so. While societal interest and effort to support foster youth in achieving higher education has grown, very few supports have evidence to show that they are effective at improving postsecondary outcomes. In an effort to address the dearth of clearly articulated, evidence-based postsecondary support approaches for foster youth, we have developed Fostering Higher Education (FHE), a comprehensive, structured, and evaluable postsecondary access and retention intervention composed of elements (professional educational advocacy, substance abuse prevention, mentoring) that are either evidence based or promising based on the scientific literature and their ability to address the outcomes of interest. This paper describes the development and youth usability and practitioner feasibility testing of the FHE intervention approach, which was developed through funding from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Youth usability feedback was primarily positive, with the majority of participants indicating they found the FHE activities interesting and useful, and were comfortable participating in them. Practitioner feasibility feedback was also primarily positive, with almost unanimous ratings of the FHE intervention components as very important to provide to youth and that all would be feasible for an organization to implement, though the mentoring components were seen as slightly less feasible than other components. Next steps and implications of this intervention development process are discussed.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

It is well documented that most youth in foster care aspire to obtain higher education and, at the same time, face daunting obstacles in doing so; some of these obstacles include a lack of supportive adults, insufficient financial resources, mental health challenges, and parenting responsibilities, among others (Batsche et al., 2014; Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004; Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012; Gillum, Lindsay, Murray, & Wells, 2016; McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003; Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2012). Encouragingly, societal interest and investment in supporting these youth in achieving their postsecondary educational goals have increased substantially over the past few years. A recent Web of Science search on the topic of foster youth and higher education found no publications prior to 2003, and a building literature on the topic since then. State legislative efforts to secure tuition remission for foster youth who attend public colleges and universities has been a trend across the country, as has the establishment of foster

youth-focused campus support programs (Dworsky & Pérez, 2010; Geiger, Hanrahan, Cheung, & Lietz, 2016; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). These efforts build on the resources made available by the federal John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, which provides states with funding to provide postsecondary support services and Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) for foster youth pursuing higher education.

While interest and effort to address this challenge has grown, very few approaches have rigorous evidence to show that they are effective at improving postsecondary outcomes of youth with foster care experience. A review of the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, for example, found no programs receiving even a marginal scientific rating in the entire “Youth Transitioning into Adulthood Programs” topic area. The lack of an evidence base leaves organizations and agencies without tested and effective approaches that they can employ to improve postsecondary outcomes for youth in care, and leaves unanswered the question of whether the programs being offered are in fact making the difference in postsecondary outcomes that they intend to make. This in turn leaves organizations with few options other than to develop their own postsecondary support programs from scratch, which rarely have clearly articulated program models that can be evaluated or replicated, resulting in more and more similar yet unevaluable programs that have little to offer in terms of advancing

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: amy.salazar@wsu.edu (A.M. Salazar), haggerty@uw.edu (K.P. Haggerty), sarisa.roe@gmail.com (S.S. Roe).

what we know about how to effectively support foster youth in achieving their higher education goals.

1.1. Current study

In an effort to address the dearth of clearly articulated, evidence-based postsecondary support approaches for use with foster youth, our research team has developed the Fostering Higher Education (FHE) intervention. FHE is a comprehensive, structured, and evaluable postsecondary access and retention intervention composed of elements that are either evidence based or promising based on the scientific literature and their ability to address the outcomes of interest. The intent of this work is to provide an evidence-based approach to providing postsecondary supports to youth in foster care if it is found to be effective through future rigorous testing.

This paper describes the development and youth usability and practitioner feasibility testing of the FHE intervention approach, which was developed through funding from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. More information about the challenges youth face in accessing and succeeding in higher education, the background of the intervention elements chosen to be part of the intervention, and detailed findings of the focus groups informing part of the intervention development process can be found in Salazar et al. (2016).

2. Intervention development background and overview

2.1. Intervention theory of change

Two theoretical frameworks are woven together to inform FHE's theory of change: the social development model (SDM; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The social development model incorporates a risk and protective factor framework that has been used to understand healthy development and problem behaviors in youth (e.g., Catalano, Kosterman, Hawkins, Newcomb, & Abbott, 1996; Huang, White, Kosterman, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2001). The SDM posits that an individual's behavior will be prosocial or antisocial depending on the degree of association and bonding with prosocial or antisocial individuals and subsequent adoption of their beliefs. Based on the SDM, we hypothesize that students' participation in FHE will lead to increased educational monitoring and postsecondary educational opportunities and skills, and that students' connection with the educational advocate and mentors in the FHE program will result in bonding with prosocial others and, in turn, increased commitment to higher education. These proximal outcomes should in turn, according to the SDM, lead to improved distal outcomes including postsecondary preparation, enrollment, persistence, progress, and performance, as well as prevention of alcohol and substance disorders and other risky behaviors that interfere with educational attainment.

Self-determination theory builds on the foundation of the SDM by providing a framework for understanding the complex, unjust, and often disempowering situations that youth in foster care often find themselves in, such as experiences of maltreatment and trauma, being removed from their families of origin, and becoming a ward of a system that has struggled at every level to find and implement effective procedures for improving the lives of the youth it oversees. Self-determination theory proposes that individuals are naturally motivated to be engaged and overcome challenges, but that this natural drive can be inhibited by external factors such as social environments. Social conditions that meet an individual's innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are believed to be essential for driving self-motivation and fostering overall well-being. Based on this theory and a similar utilization of it in another study (Geenen et al., 2015), we anticipate that participation in FHE will help students gain self-determination skills and believe in their ability to be successful in college.

2.2. Intervention development framework

The Deployment-Focused Model of Intervention Development and Testing (Weisz, 2004) was used to guide the FHE intervention development process. The Deployment-Focused Model guides intervention development in the context of the actual settings in which they would take place, so that they fit easily into practice once tested and ready for dissemination. More about this framework can be found in Salazar et al. (2016).

Our intervention development process consists of seven key steps, which are summarized in Table 1. The current paper details Steps 1 and 3 through 6; Step 2 is summarized in the current paper, but is described in detail in Salazar et al. (2016). Future work will involve rigorous efficacy testing (Step 7).

3. Intervention development process

3.1. Step 1: review intervention elements

Three primary intervention elements included in FHE are educational advocacy (EA), substance abuse prevention programming, and mentoring. These three intervention elements have been used in a variety of different forms to support the educational goals of youth in foster care and other vulnerable and at-risk populations. They were chosen to be included in the FHE intervention because of their ability to address a host of challenges that youth may experience in relation to both accessing and participating in higher education, as well as their ability to be highly structured yet flexible in meeting the unique needs of individual youth. Literature reviews and program searches were conducted to identify the wide variety of existing EA, mentoring, and substance abuse prevention intervention approaches and the evidence for each so we could make a more informed decision about what form and structure of each intervention element to include in FHE. For example, our literature review on mentoring programs revealed that mentoring relationships lasting less than a year can actually lead to negative youth outcomes; thus, we decided that our mentoring program element would need to be implemented for a minimum of one year. Table 2 summarizes some of the conclusions drawn from our literature reviews that we used to inform the FHE intervention design.

Table 1
Fostering Higher Education (FHE) intervention development steps.

Development step	Purpose
1. Review intervention elements	Review various existing educational advocacy, mentoring, and substance abuse prevention intervention approaches to explore the variety of forms each approach can take and help inform our approach to each intervention element
2. Focus groups	Community stakeholders (practitioners, youth with foster care experience) were asked for their recommendations for structuring and delivering FHE to maximize its effectiveness
3. Develop initial intervention approach	Convene expert workgroup to develop intervention design based on information collected in Steps 1 and 2 as well as feedback from research and practice professionals with expertise in key topical areas
4. Youth theater testing	Assess youth usability and acceptability of the intervention
5. Practitioner feasibility testing	Assess perceived feasibility of the intervention being implemented in community organizations
6. Finalize intervention design	Articulate near-final intervention design and implementation instructions in implementation manual form; have content experts review the manual and provide final feedback on the design; develop training manual
7. Effectiveness testing	Rigorously test whether FHE is effective at bringing about intended outcomes

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4936619>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4936619>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)