



Development of a Self-Care Training for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care

Elyse Young, OTS; Rachel Ashcraft, MS, OTR/L, TBRI® Practitioner

Department of Occupational Therapy | University of Alabama at Birmingham

Caron Sandefur, LICSW-S PIP | Children's Aid Society of Alabama

Introduction

- In 2022, 18,538 youth emancipated or “aged out” of the foster care system in the United States (United States Children’s Bureau, 2023).
- The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections Act, 2008) requires that youth receive a transition plan 90 days prior to their 18th birthday, developed in part by their caseworker and other representatives chosen by the youth, which outlines next steps for housing, education, employment, mentoring, and continued support services (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018).
- Despite the many layers of support to promote success among transitioning youth, outcomes like educational achievement and acquiring employment have not improved (Paul-Ward & Lambdin-Pattavina, 2016).
- Foster youth are more likely to experience mental health disorders when compared to same-age peers in their communities and those mental health problems increased in correlation to the number of foster placements they had (Dubois-Comtois et al., 2021).
- Youth with foster care experience are twice as likely to experience suicidal ideation and three times as likely to attempt suicide than same-age peers in comparison populations (Evans et al., 2017).
- Healthcare providers can support the mental health of young people by helping them to establish positive self-care practices (Office of Population Affairs, 2023).
- Occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) have the expertise to support foster youth with developing self-care skills through interventions that target client factors, such as emotional regulation and self-concept; performance skills, such as process and social interaction skills; activity patterns, which include engagement in health-promoting roles and routines; and occupations, like ADLs, IADLs, health management, rest and sleep, play, and leisure.
- Children’s Aid Society of Alabama (CAS) is a non-profit organization that offers various services for children and families across the state. In partnership with the Department of Human Resources (DHR), CAS has an Independent Living (IL) program that provides youth preparing to exit foster care with resources, education, community, and connections to support them in their transition (Children’s Aid Society, 2024).

Methods

Program Development Steps:

- Create training and materials
 - Contents informed by organization’s needs and included evidence-based, OT concepts
- Create post-survey
- Implement training with foster youth at CAS IL Transitional Living Program (TLP) visits
- Interpret post-survey results and organization feedback

Program Details: 1-hour group self-care training at TLPs before the regular scheduled CAS lesson. Participants received a workbook handout to reference and complete throughout the training. Participants were asked to complete a 12-question, Likert-scale survey at the end of the training to evaluate program effectiveness. Survey contained 3 open-ended questions to gain qualitative data.

Training Topics:

- Self-care occupations
- Occupational balance
- Healthy habits and routines
- Personal goal writing

Participant Population:

- Between the ages of 14-21
- Living at the following TLPs:
 - Eagle Rock – Rainbow City, AL
 - King’s Home – Chelsea, AL
 - Grace House – Fairfield, AL
- Attending CAS IL lesson for the month of October

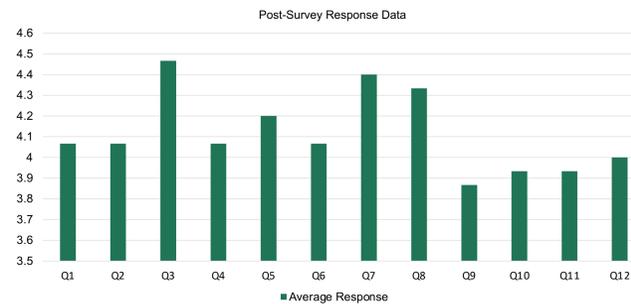


Scan to View Handout

Results

Sample Size: 15 participants across the 3 TLP visits

Q#	QUESTION	AVERAGE	INTERPRETATION
Q1	Please rate your overall happiness with this course.	4.066666667	Somewhat Happy
Q2	Please rate the course’s ability to teach self-care occupations.	4.066666667	Good
Q3	Please rate the course’s ability to teach: the impact of self-care on mental health.	4.466666667	Very Good
Q4	Please rate the course’s ability to teach occupational balance.	4.066666667	Good
Q5	Please rate the course’s ability to teach the impact of occupational balance on mental health.	4.2	Good
Q6	Please rate the course’s ability to teach habits and routines.	4.066666667	Good
Q7	Please rate the course’s ability to teach effective goal writing.	4.4	Very Good
Q8	Please rate the course’s ability to teach daily activities to monitor/encourage daily self-care.	4.333333333	Very Good
Q9	After taking this course, I know more than I did before about how to prioritize self-care in my daily life and achieve occupational balance.	3.866666667	Somewhat Agree
Q10	After taking this course, I am more confident in my ability to prioritize self-care in my daily life.	3.933333333	Somewhat Agree
Q11	After taking this course, I am more confident in my ability to navigate life as an independent adult.	3.933333333	Somewhat Agree
Q12	I would recommend this course to a peer.	4	Somewhat Agree



Discussion

Survey Results:

- Survey results completed by participants revealed that they felt the course supported self-care as a strategy for mental health support.
- Quantitative data reflects positive results for all 12 questions and showed particularly strong results for this training’s ability to teach:
 - The impact of self-care on mental health
 - Effective goal writing
 - Daily activities that can monitor or encourage self-care
- Qualitative data was limited, but reflects overall positive feelings about the training:
 - “I liked how you explained self-care and goals. It made me happy.”
 - “I enjoyed answering the questions asked and I wasn’t bored.”
 - “I like learning new things and having fun.”
 - “I think [what made me happy] was being able to have people that understand you.”
 - “I feel like it was very helpful.”
- Qualitative data also reflected areas for improvement for future research:
 - “Explain more.”
 - “More time.”

Capstone Site Feedback:

- CAS staff gave positive feedback regarding the program development project and resources.
- They stated that the principal investigator was able to bring a new approach to the TLP visits, by providing life skill education through an occupational therapy lens.
- Additionally, they shared that foster youth are often taught to view self-care as an “in-crisis” coping skill, but this collaborative lesson created an opportunity to help them explore an alternative approach.

Discussion continued

Capstone Site Feedback Continued:

- Staff mentioned that this training explored different important aspects to self-care including habits and routines, specifically establishing preventative health routines.
- Staff felt that this type of training was accessible and easy for youth to understand and could be transferrable to other programs that CAS offers including:
 - Project Independence (PI), which serves homeless mothers aged 16-21 by providing safe housing and essential life skills training
 - Adoptive Family Groups (AFG) that provide support to all members of adoptive families
 - Effective Parenting Instruction Course (EPIC), a free 6-week parenting class

Limitations and Areas of Improvement:

- Small sample size.
- Training offered at limited TLPs due to time constraints.
- Offer group trainings for longer duration and higher frequency.
- Social desirability response bias as principal investigator led group and distributed surveys.

Conclusion

- The results of this program development project indicate the feasibility for OTPs to make a positive impact within the foster youth population through providing self-care education.
- OTPs and social welfare staff can collaborate to provide diversified support to foster youth.
- OTPs have a role within transitional services for youth who are aging out of the foster care system and should continue to explore self-care education strategies for improving health and well-being.
- Future research should be conducted to increase literature regarding the role of occupational therapy among youth who are transitioning from foster care, as well as other vulnerable populations who are involved in social welfare programs.

References

- Children’s Aid Society. (2024). *Independent living*. <https://childrensaid.org/what-we-do/programs/independent-living/>
- Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018). *Working with youth to develop a transition plan*. https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/transitional_plan.pdf
- Dubois-Comtois, K., Bussi eres, E., Cyr, C., St-Onge, J., Baundry, C., Milot, T., & Labb e, A. (2021). Are children and adolescents in foster care at greater risk of mental health problems than their counterparts? A meta-analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 127, 106100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2021.106100>
- Evans, R., White, J., Turley, R., Slater, T., Morgan, H., Strange, H., & Scourfield, J. (2017). Comparison of suicidal ideation, suicide attempt and suicide in children and young people in care and non-care populations: Systematic review and meta-analysis of prevalence. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 82, 122-129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2017.09.020>
- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-351, 122 Stat. 3949 (2008). <https://www.congress.gov/110/plaws/publ351/PLAW-110publ351.pdf>
- Office of Population Affairs. (2023, May). *Improving mental health by promoting self-care*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://opa.hhs.gov/about/news/e-updates/improving-mental-health-promoting-self-care>
- Paul-Ward, A., & Lambdin-Pattavina, C. A. (2016). The issue is – New roles for occupational therapy to promote independence among youth aging out of foster care. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 70(3), 7003360010. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2016.017426>
- United States Children’s Bureau. (2023, May) *The adoption and foster care analysis and reporting system (AFCARS) report – no. 30*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-report-30.pdf>

Acknowledgement & Contact information

I would like to thank Mrs. Rachel Ashcraft, Dr. Megan Carpenter, Mrs. Caron Sandefur, Ms. Sam Whitley, Ms. Angel Boisclair, and the employees of CAS for welcoming me into their programs.
Elyse Young, OTS Email: youngem@uab.edu