



Project FUTURES

RESEARCH & TRAINING CENTER FOR PATHWAYS TO POSITIVE FUTURES



*Findings from a Near-Peer Coaching
Intervention for College Students with
Foster Care Backgrounds and Mental
Health Challenges*

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Agenda for today



- **Jennifer Blakeslee** is FUTURES PI
- Model development and implementation
- Preliminary quantitative analysis of intervention impact
- Lessons learned for future research/practice with this population



- **Becky Miller** was the GRA and is now Project Manager
- Qualitative findings exploring student perspectives of mental health experiences and foster care backgrounds
- Participant recommendations to improve mental health supports
- Implications to inform campus-based programming



Development of the FUTURES model

Based on the **My Life** model for older youth in foster care -- weekly coaching by program staff to increase youth self-determination skills

(Powers, Geenen, Powers, et al., 2012; Geenen, Powers, Powers, et al., 2013)

Better Futures was tested next (N=67):

- High school youth in care / MH challenges / interest in post-secondary
- Near-peer coaching by undergrads with shared lived FC/MH experience
- Bi-monthly, pared-down My Life curriculum (focused on education/career/MH)
- *Significant gains on measures of self-determination, post-secondary participation and preparation, hope, and mental health empowerment*

(Geenen, Powers, Phillips, et al. 2014; Phillips, Powers, Geenen et al., 2015)



Project FUTURES implementation

- Same near-peer coaching as Better Futures, but for students already **enrolled in first two years of post-secondary education** at PSU and community colleges
- Ages 18-26, with **foster care experience** (recruited through DHS/ILP) and self-identified **mental health stressors**
- Coaches have shared lived experience in FC/MH, 4-day training and weekly supervision, mix of undergrads (junior/senior) and grad students
- Coaching for one academic year, with monthly group workshops, focus on academic/career success and managing mental health
- Local *Campus Champions* network - trained faculty/staff who volunteer to be a supportive “point person” in various campus departments



Research Questions

Do FUTURES participants make significant gains, and show significant differences from the control group participants, on post-intervention measures of:

Self-determination:

- *Self-Determination Scale* (Sheldon & Deci, 1996)
- *AIR Self-Determination Scale* (Wolman, Campeau, Dubois, et al., 1994)

Self-efficacy:

- *Career Decision Self-Efficacy-Short Form* (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996)
- *Youth Efficacy and Empowerment Scale-MH* (Walker & Powers, 2007)

Academic outcomes: Post-secondary retention, GPA, credits earned

Well-being: *Quality of Life Questionnaire* (Schalock, & Keith, 1993), *Social Provisions Scale* (Cutrona & Russell, 1987), *Brief Symptom Inventory* (Derogatis & Spencer, 1982)



Methods

- Assessment at baseline in the fall (Time 1, N=66), the following spring (Time 2, n=46), and subsequent fall term (Time 3, n=39)
- Mean age=20.16, 73% female, 32% LGBTQ, 49% non-white/mixed race, 21% Hispanic
- There were no statistically significant baseline differences between the treatment and control groups on study parameters
- We tested for mean differences over time
 - Treatment group gains over time (T1 vs. T2, T1 vs. T3)
 - Intervention effects (Treatment vs. Control at T2 and T3)



Self-Determination/Self-Efficacy

No significant self-determination findings (AIR or SDS) (there is one trend-level post-intervention finding for a brief SD scale we piloted)

Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE)

- Coached group made significant gains T1 to T2 ($p < .000$) with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = .855$), maintained at T3
- Intervention effect at T2 ($p = .027$), with a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = .674$), group differences are maintained at T3
- Significant effect for subscales for *self-appraisal*, *planning*, *problem-solving* (not sig. for *occupational info*, *goal selection*)



Youth Efficacy and Empowerment-Mental Health

Intervention effect on the **YEES-MH** overall score favoring the treatment group compared to the control group at Time 2 ($p=.017$)

- Medium effect size (Cohen's $d = .733$)
- Effect seems to be focused on *Services* subscale (e.g., *When a service or support is not working for me, I take steps to get it changed*)
- Trend-level ($p=.055$) for *Self* subscale (e.g., *I know how to take care of my mental or emotional health*)
- No group differences at T3

No findings for **mental health symptoms, social support, quality of life**



Academic Outcomes

No significant findings for **college retention** or **credits earned**

GPA:

- No effect when comparing Time 1 vs. Time 2
- Intervention effect at **Time 3** ($p=.024$)
 - Large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.046$)
 - Intervention GPA = 3.12 vs. Control GPA = 2.56
 - May change with full Time 3 sample
- Self-reported, but students were asked to check their transcript



Limitations/Lessons learned

- Recruitment and retention challenges
 - Started just with PSU, branched out to community colleges
 - Initial assessment packet was overly long, very college-specific
 - Different developmental stage, busier/more independent/focused
- Coaching challenges (not enough “distance”)
 - *Very-near-peers* - we were often “coaching the coach”
 - Lesson learned to use grad students (or just more life experience)
- Surprised not to have self-determination findings in the mix
- Findings to be submitted to a journal soon - aligned w/qual findings...



Qualitative sub-study

- Sub-study exploring student perspectives of MH experiences and foster care backgrounds in the college context
- Helped us understand what support students are using, especially around mental health, and perceived challenges and successes
- Useful insight into students' foster care identity on campus, and ways in which that identity is supported (or not supported)
- Student recommendations around supporting and integrating mental health, foster care, and student identities on campus



Qualitative Methods

- **Interviews:** Conducted 18 interviews with FUTURES students who were coached at PSU, PCC, MHCC
- **Demographics:** 72% female, 78% identified as non-white or mixed race, and 28% identified as LGBTQIA
- **Analysis:** Conducted Thematic Analysis, first coding inductively at the semantic level, then organizing codes into themes and then reviewing themes for report development



THEME: The Foster Care Experience

Throughout the interviews, descriptions of mental health and stress were often intertwined with the foster care experience.

- **Feelings of Otherness**

- Feeling **“different”**, **“weird”**, or like they **“don’t fit”**
- General lack of knowledge about foster care experience on campus
 - **“The majority of the professors don’t understand...”**
- Difficulty sharing life story/wrestling with identity on campus



THEME: The Foster Care Experience (cont.)

- **Stacking Stressors**

- Mental health stress, academic stress, and social stress were all connected and hard to separate.
- Compounded problems including past trauma or foster care-related issues, with new academic expectations
 - *...college itself is very stressful, and then [not having] help to manage health stresses...*

- **Self-reliance**

- Often described as a default, necessity or mindset
 - *...you don't tend to rely on others to...make your experience better*
- Used when resources failed to connect - *“you're on your own”*



THEME: Institutional and Social Supports

- **Importance of Trusted Supports and Resources**
 - Extremely important to student success and feelings of well-being
 - Came up as campus supports like Trio, Future Connect, instructors, or student resource people
 - *...sometimes it's a lot easier to get through things when you ask for help, even if it seems like you don't fit*
 - Off-campus mental health support and foster care support systems also mentioned
- **Importance of Mental Health Resources and Accommodations**
 - Counselors/therapists, on campus and in community
 - *...I think if we had more of that verbal, 'I'm totally here to support you'... I think that we would be more inclined to strive...*
 - Need for a variety of mental health options like groups, accommodations, instructors, classroom support, and self-care.



Recommendations to Improve Foster Student Services

- Increased general MH resources like low-barrier talk support, text support, and crisis support, and additional counselors who understand the foster care experience
 - *...so [people] can help no matter if they have been a foster youth or not*
- Improved understanding of the foster care experience/training for campus faculty/staff
 - *...I guess that'd make me feel more comfortable if professors the first day are like, 'Hey...I know a lot of you have mental health problems, and you can come talk to me'*
- Student panels (*"space to talk about our experiences"*) and services where *"people don't have to search so hard"*



Conclusion/Implications

- Our findings tell us that a students' foster care identity needs to be supported on campus with specific services and connections to varied mental health services
- Self-determination is one piece of the puzzle - the other is post-secondary institutions meeting students where they are
- Important to connect with campus success initiatives to share our findings
- These findings will be submitted as a manuscript soon

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The screenshot shows the website for the Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures. The header includes a logo, the organization's name, a search bar, and a newsletter sign-up button. A navigation menu lists Home, About, Research, Training, Publications, and Connect. The main content area features a 'Publications' section with a description and links to 'Featured Products' and 'Publications Search'. A large image of graduates is displayed, along with social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Below this is a horizontal menu with 'Publications', 'Webinars', and 'Training'. The main heading reads 'Improving the Lives of Young People with Serious Mental Health Conditions Through Research & Training'. Three featured items are shown: 'PATHWAYS PUBLICATIONS' with a journal article and report, 'Introducing the Pathways Comic' with a date and comic panels, and 'New Journal Article Compares Outcomes of Online Training for Service Providers' with a date and author information.

www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu

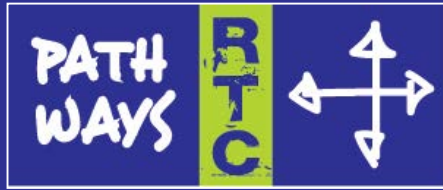


Q & A

- Any questions about the findings?
- Thoughts about the implications for programming?
- Have you had similar findings or experiences with campus-based programming for this population?

Feel free to contact us with questions or feedback!

- About the program model - **Becky Miller** (ramiller@pdx.edu)
- About the research - **Jennifer Blakeslee** (jblakes@pdx.edu)



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