

Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) Program
Westchester Institute for Human Development
University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
And
New York Medical College
Team Project Abstract
2012-2013

Title: Program Outcomes Following Reunification after Residential Foster Care

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Background:

Families involved in the child welfare system experience many disadvantages: poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse difficulties, parents with developmental difficulties, and children with significant emotional, behavioral and developmental problems. A previous study of families whose children re-entered foster care, in a large county with suburban and urban areas, found that 62% of mothers had substance abuse issues with almost a one-third also having mental health diagnosis. This review found that 85% of these children re-entering care also had special needs. Within 12 months of discharge, 20% of the children re-entered the foster care system.

In the targeted county, the services families received prior to reunification were typically not available after their discharge from foster care. The limited access to supports and resources to sustain reunification increased their vulnerability to re-entry to the foster care system.

In 2005, to address the issue of foster care re-entry, the Department of Social Services (DSS) funded support services called "Aftercare Programs" for every child exiting either: foster care, therapeutic foster care or residential placements. Three agencies provided comprehensive, in-home community-based services for up to two years post-discharge. These programs utilized a family empowerment model designed to address the significant needs of reuniting families while also promoting safety, permanency and the well-being of their participants. The ultimate goals of the programs were to support family progress over a two year period and assist with transitioning families to community-based services in order to prevent future replacement into foster care.

Method: DSS and the Aftercare agencies agreed to examine program implementation, efficacy and outcomes looking at a cohort of families who received services from 2009-2011. Statistical analysis explored a database of 251 children who were placed in therapeutic and residential foster care settings and received Aftercare services from two of the agencies.

Results: Results indicated that 17.8% of these children re-entered care, including 59.3% who re-entered a system other than foster care. Descriptive statistics showed the profiles of youth served.

Conclusion: Further analyses should look at factors that affect youth outcomes in these programs. This study has implications for the future development and planning of successful Aftercare programs as well as continued areas for research to clarify the needs of this population post-discharge.