



Program Outcomes Following Reunification After Residential Foster Care

Rena Levy, B.S., Ann Mergler, M.B.A., & Lindsay Nahum, Psy.D. LEND Fellows
 Jenean Castillo, Ph.D., & Lillian Medina, LCSW, LEND Mentors

Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) Program, Westchester Institute for Human Development, and New York Medical College



Background

One of the biggest challenges for the Child Welfare System is sustaining successful reunification of families who continue to have complex and chronic needs after children are discharged from foster care placement. The challenge is increased when the children have significant social and emotional difficulties that require alternative foster care placements. Re-entry rates are of critical importance because they indicate that children are being re-exposed to child abuse, neglect, and/or trauma. The federal expectation is that re-entry rate after one year of discharge from foster care is no higher than 8.6% (AFCARS, 2005). In 2004, Westchester County DSS reported a re-entry rate of 20%. This led to the start of 3 Aftercare programs to support families reuniting after foster care placement.

Project Goals

1. Describe the characteristics of youth participating in two of Westchester County's After Care Programs designed to support youth returning home after residential placement
2. Determine the re-entry rate for participants in two of the Westchester County After Care Programs
3. Identify factors that affected successful reunification of youth in residential foster care with their caregivers

Community Partnerships

Sharifa Armorer- Senior Director of Community Based Services
 Family Services of Westchester
 Kirsten Coveney Clarke- STEP Clinical Program Manager
 Children's Village
 Maureen Flores- Manager, Children's Residential Services
 DSS

Methods

Study Design:

Archival record review of data collected via questionnaires administered by program case managers to families who participated in the programs between 2009 and 2011.

Descriptive statistics and statistical analyses including chi square analyses were used to discern those factors which most impact successful reunification as measured by no re-entry into foster care two years after discharge.

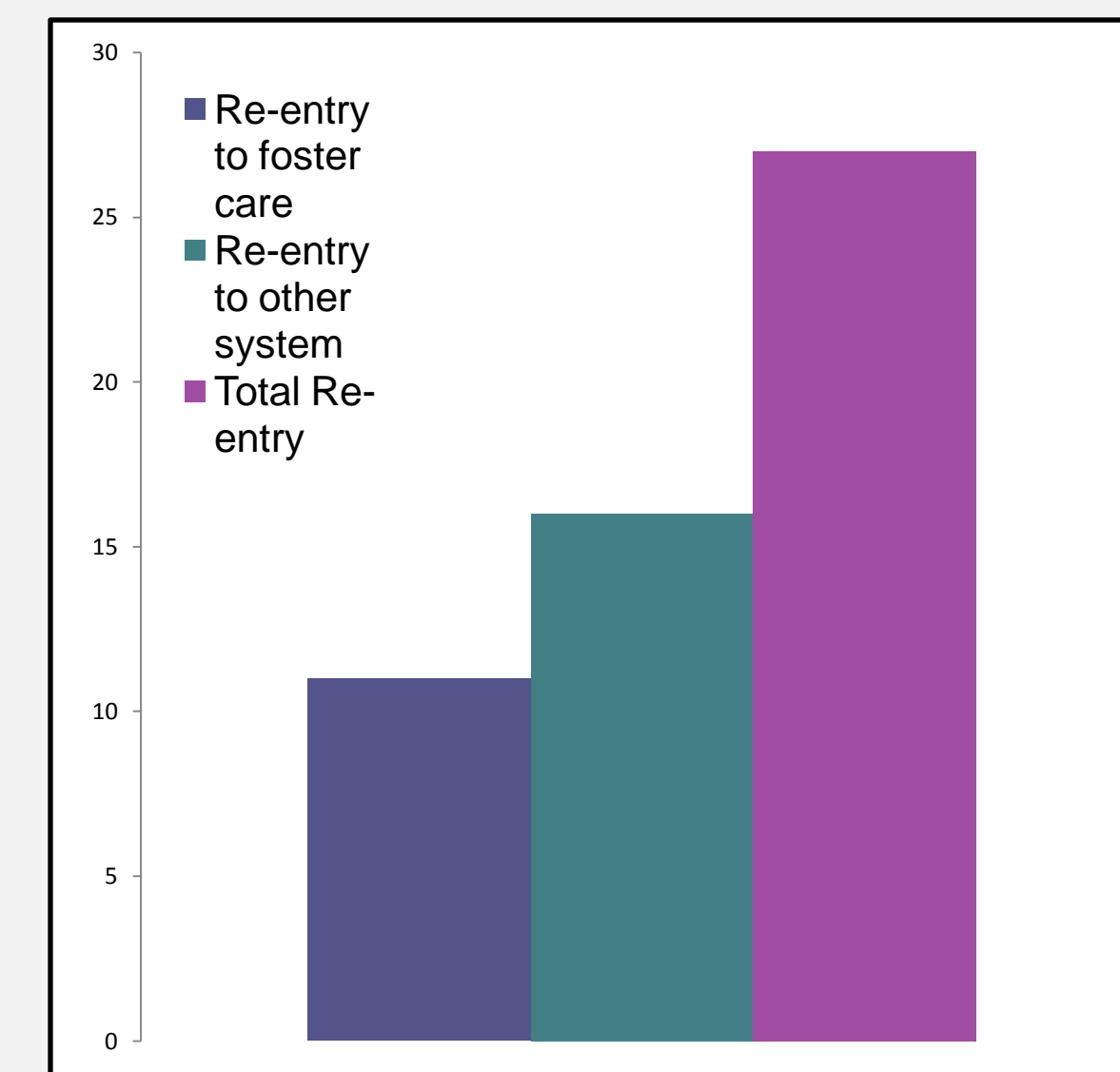
Participants and Setting:

Participants included 152 children who were in alternative foster care placements including residential, therapeutic, and group homes.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Gender (N=147)		
Male		61.8%
Female		34.2%
Age in Years(N = 150)		
0-10		2.7%
11-14		10.7%
15 and older		86.7%
Length of Time in Foster Care (N= 121)		
0-15 months		52.1%
16-36 months		47.1%
Over 36 months		0.8%
Length of Time in AfterCare (N= 126)		
0-12 months		31.7%
13-24 months		50.0%
Over 25 months		19.3%

Results



Of the 147 children identified:

- 17.8% (N = 27) re-entered care
- 40.7% (N = 11) of those who re-entered care, re-entered the foster care system
- 59.3% (N = 16) of those who re-entered care, re-entered a system other than foster care

Of the 145 children identified:

- 8.6% had a substantiated abuse/neglect report while involved in the Aftercare programs
- 24.8% had involvement in the penal system through PINS, probation, incarceration and/or parole.
- 72.1% were either involved in education and/or employment programs.

Chi Square analyses examining factors related to re-entry did not reveal any significant differences.

Conclusions

The archival data was compiled over three years by multiple staff from two separate programs. The occurrence of missing data led to the exclusion of some participants from the data analyses, and limited the robustness of the findings.

The aggregate data shows a re-entry rate of 17.8% overall with 40.7% of returning youth re-entering the foster care system.

Further exploration of program data should be conducted to determine whether those children who participated in Aftercare had lower re-entry rates than those who did not.

Future research should explore:

- What factors contributed to re-entry into systems of care, including parental factors.
- The potential impact of involvement in education, vocational training and employment on re-entry into care.

New programs should take into account program evaluation measures from their inception to enhance data collection.

Reference

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), 2005. Washington, DC: United States Department of Human Services Administration for Children and Families.

