TEXAS TRAINING PROJECT: PREPARATION FOR ADULT LIVING SUPERVISOR TRAINING AND EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM (PAL-STEP)

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The purpose of this paper is to present the process and outcomes of one of 19 grants the Children's Bureau has given since the Chafee Act was passed in 1999. The aim of the Preparation for Adult Living: Supervisor Training and Empowerment Program (PAL-STEP) project was to maximize for youth in foster care, their successful transition to independent living. All 19 training projects focus on enhancing the chances of success for youth aging out of the foster care system. The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (part of the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 [P.L. 106-169]) main goal is the provision of more flexible funding to enable states to design and implement a variety of programs to assist youth in the process of making the transition from foster care to independent living to self-sufficiency. The Adoption Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) main goals of safety, permanency, and well-being must be the underlying practice principles guiding programs to assist youth of all ages transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) provide a means of evaluating state child welfare programs and examines if services are being provided to help the child achieve the goal of adult living. Successful transitions for youth in foster care to adulthood and self-sufficiency can be facilitated by effective training of child welfare supervisors on the delivery and management of independent living programs.

Texas Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) (conducted in February 2002) found Item 10, relating to the Permanency Goal of Alternative Long Term Care or Adult Living (part of Permanency Outcome 1), to be a strength for Texas. Since that time, the state has experienced a reduction in the rating for item 10. Child welfare supervisors have enormous influence on child welfare workers' performance and retention (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2003; 2007). Supervisors' training is

key to the transference of policy to practice. The project provided wide-ranging and collaborative training to child welfare supervisors. Training goals were to increase the child welfare supervisor's ability to guide caseworkers in understanding the developmental challenges of youth who will be transitioning to adulthood and self-sufficiency, and the programs available in the transition. Training for supervisors was thought to be one solution and was the motivation for applying for the Children's Bureau training grant in 2005.

The training projects provided an experiential and comprehensive approach to improve supervisors' and therefore caseworkers, knowledge and skills to address ILP policy and practice areas of concern. The project employed the collaborative efforts of the University of Houston and The University of Texas at Arlington schools of Social Work, and Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). PAL-STEP developed, implemented, and evaluated a curriculum for child welfare supervisors focused on strengthening their supervision of worker interventions with foster youth. The training included web-based learning and a one-day workshop for experiential learning. To ensure transfer of knowledge, each trainee received a "tool kit" of teaching strategies to use with their workers. Over one hundred and twenty-five CPS supervisors in Texas were trained on the PAL-STEP curriculum. The locations of the trainings were spread throughout Texas and represented the diversity of Texas: urban and rural, multi-ethnic communities as well as those mainly Hispanic or African American.

Developing the Curriculum

The project built upon existing and longstanding partnerships between the Universities, DFPS, and the Protective Services Training Institute, along with established relationships with human service agencies working with youth aging out of foster care. One of the first steps we took was to establish an advisory committee of our partners, including foster parents, foster youth, and youth who have aged out of care.

Our underlying philosophical stance was that training be grounded in a culturally responsive developmental perspective addressing the challenges of adolescence from the perspective of the youth in foster care. After review of the existing evidenced based literature it was decided the curriculum needed to provide child welfare supervisors a better understanding of the philosophy of positive youth development and the developmental milestones of adolescence to better guide the caseworker in transitioning youth out of foster care. So often youth age out of care with no permanency options, little employment history, lack of high-school degree, and overall lack of independent living skills (Scannapieco, 1998, 2000). Given this, it was determined child welfare supervisors need to have knowledge of the community partners in their area so caseworkers will know who they can collaborate with to meet the needs of youth transitioning to self-sufficiency. PAL-STEP project delivered the necessary training to child welfare supervisors to strengthen their ability to

guide caseworkers in providing effective delivery and management of independent living services.

The training was designed in two parts. A web-based training was developed to present theoretical material, such as adolescent development and the four core principles indentified in the literature (positive youth development, collaboration, culture, and permanent connections). Completion of the web-based training was a prerequisite to participating in a one-day face-to-face training, delivered by a training team made up of a person who aged out of the foster care system and a university faculty member. The major goals and objective of the curriculum were:

Goal 1. CPS supervisors will have the knowledge and skills needed to ensure adolescent youth in foster care make a successful transition to independent living.

Objective 1.1. Develop a curriculum for CPS supervisors that incorporate the four core program principles associated with successful transition programs: positive youth development, collaboration, cultural competence, and permanent connection.

Objective 1.2. CPS supervisors who complete Preparation for Adult Living-Supervisory Training and Empowerment Program (PAL-STEP) will demonstrate increased knowledge of the theory and application of the four core areas of positive youth development, collaboration, cultural competence, and permanent connection, as demonstrated by a pre-test and post-test.

Goal 2. CPS supervisors will transfer their knowledge of the four core principles to those they supervise, enabling CPS workers to help foster youth successfully transition to independent living.

Objective 2.1. Develop a teaching kit for supervisors who attend PAL-STEP that will help them teach their workers the theory and application of the four core principles.

Objective 2.2. CPS workers whose supervisor has attended PAL-STEP will be more likely to increase integration of the four core principle in their work with adolescent clients than those whose supervisor has not attended training as demonstrated in their service plans.

Training Curriculum

The PAL-STEP training was developed with input from multiple sources. First, we convened an Advisory Committee comprised of DFPS-CPS administrators, foster care supervisors, independent living coordinators, foster parents, foster youth, former foster youth, university faculty, Protective Services Training Institute of Texas representation, and project evaluators. We also conducted focus groups with foster youth, former foster youth, foster parents, and independent living workers and supervisors in the Houston and Dallas regions (see Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007). Finally, a review of the literature on the issues facing youth aging

out of foster care, transitioning to independent living, and adult learning theory was performed. These three elements guided curriculum development. The Advisory Committee continually reviewed the curriculum, suggested changes and made improvements until a final version was approved.

The overall curriculum is based on four core concepts: positive youth development, collaboration, cultural responsiveness, and permanent connections. Transcending the four principles and infused through the curriculum is information on adolescent development, including an appreciation for adolescence and strategies to work more effectively with youth.

Positive Youth Development.

Positive youth development is a deliberate process by which youth are engaged in supportive relationships, which enables them to develop the living skills and knowledge to maintain their emotional health needed to function on their own (Mohamed & Wheeler, 2001; Pruett et al., 2000; Roth, et al. 1998; Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007). Positive youth development requires not only a supportive environment, but also opportunities for leadership and the development of life skills. This philosophy is central to making a successful transition to self-sufficiency. Foster children who approach independence need a support system, formed deliberately and intentionally, based upon a thorough assessment of the adolescent (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007). Assessment must be grounded in developmental theory and an understanding of the challenge of achieving self-sufficiency.

An underlying philosophical component of positive youth development is the idea that problem situations should be assessed from the youth's perspective. The bridge between childhood and adulthood, adolescence brings physical, social, emotional, and cognitive changes in an individual. Successful achievement of primary developmental tasks in adolescence can have a marked impact on this transition (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005). One goal of this training was to equip supervisors with the knowledge of developmentally appropriate and empirically based assessments and interventions for youth. Supervisors who understand youth-focused practice will be able to guide their workers in engaging youth aging out of care as participants in their case and life planning. It is the hope that youth who make permanent connections, have supportive environments, and become good decision-makers will be able to become self-sufficient adults and productive members of society. The knowledge and support supervisors pass to their workers is central to achieving this goal.

A core component of positive youth development and an appreciation of adolescent development indicate youth need to be involved in decision making for their future. Engaging youth as planners for their own lives is important because it embraces their ability to make decisions and affirms their capacity for self-sufficiency. We sought to equip supervisors with the ability to guide workers on adolescent

assessment and their readiness for independent living services. The curriculum is grounded in the philosophy that appropriate assessments will result in an identification of crisis situations, potential long-term stressors, and cultural issues that may have an impact on planning for independence; and supervisors who understand this will be able to train and supervise workers according to this philosophy. Supervisors who recognize the challenges of aging out including those related to obtaining housing, transportation, and employment; acquiring basic living skill; completing and pursuing education; reliance on public assistance; mental and behavioral health problems and understand the co-existing stressors of adolescence and self-sufficiency can guide their workers in more thorough planning and assessment, resulting in better independent living service planning and management services.

Collaboration.

Collaboration is also essential to successfully move youth to independent living. Collaborations help ensure a full array of services are available to the youth during and after their transition from care. Child welfare supervisors need to acknowledge youth, at least in the short-term, move from dependent to interdependent living rather than independent living (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007). An important aspect of living interdependently is the assistance needed from collaborators who are committed to the functioning, well-being, and needs of youth, and may include foster parents, community agencies, and persons with whom the youth feel connected. For example, supervisors can help caseworkers engage foster parents and foster youth to identify the type of life skills youth can practice in the home, such as grocery shopping or managing money. Supervisors can also guide caseworkers to assess the services youth need while they are in care to plan their needs when they exit care. Establishing collaborative relationships early, while the youth is in care, can help make the transitions more successful since supports will already be in place.

Training CPS supervisors, who in turn share their experience with workers, about community agencies who provide services to youth is also essential in giving youth the support they need to make this transition. Transition Resource Action Center (TRAC) in Dallas and The Houston Alumni and Youth Center (HAYC) in Houston partnered with this project and serve on the Advisory Team. The collaboration of DFPS, community agencies, foster parents, youth, and university experts in developing this curriculum solidified the common goal of training DFPS supervisors with the knowledge and skill to move youth to successful independent living. The importance of collaboration within and outside the agency is important for the transition to adulthood and was vital to the development and implementation of this curriculum.

Cultural Responsiveness.

Embedded in this project is a focus on cultural responsiveness. Attention to cultural issues transcends all areas of this project to ensure youth feel protected in their

environments. In the foster care system in Texas, Hispanics represent 36% of those in care, African Americans represent 29%, and Caucasians comprise 33% (DFPS, 2004). Understanding culture is essential to developing a training curriculum so youth are provided culturally and developmentally appropriate interventions and support systems to promote their independence. Beyond the ethnic cultures, this project also explored other culturally relevant issues that impact the successful transition to independent living. We viewed adolescence as a culture, and this appreciation is infused throughout the curriculum. We also included content on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth.

Permanent Connections.

Youth need permanent connections, whether formal or informal, to ground them in a community and provide the support traumatized youth often lack. Attention was given to this guiding principle in curriculum development. The importance of human relationships and connectedness to others during adolescence is well established and a primary task of adolescent emotional development (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005). Thoughtful planning and seeking for ways to increase the connectedness of youth achieving independence was central to the preparation of this developmentally grounded curriculum. Involving youth in the decision to seek connections and assisting them with developing and maintaining connections is an important role of the child welfare supervisor and worker.

Foster youth often lack both an emotional and physical place to return in times of need, and such connections must be established for youth in care who may age out, as well as those who have already exited care (Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007). Supervisors can help caseworkers talk with foster parents and caregivers prior to the youth exiting care to determine whether the foster parent is willing to be available to the youth. Other possible connections the youth may have should be explored, including family members, friends, and community agencies that may serve as a resource to the youth. Engaging the youth in identifying possible individuals to contact would also be useful, and serve the dual purpose of encouraging their input into their case planning. The need for permanent connections resounded loudly in the focus groups we conducted (see Scannapieco, Connell-Carrick, & Painter, 2007). Some youth were aware that they had no one. Some alumni sought family after leaving care and were disappointed with the result. Believing they could rely on the family they dreamed of while in care, these youth felt abandoned and hopeless with no alternative plan for adult connection and support. As a result, the task of finding, mending, and establishing connections for the youth in care and after they have aged out is paramount to the successful transition to adulthood.

The role of former foster children who have made the transition to independence was central to both the development and implementation of this project. Engaging youth in curriculum development helped the program be more responsive

to youth (Zeldin, Shepherd et al., 2000), and research has shown youth involvement in independent living curriculum development to improve the quality of independent living curriculum, increase creativity of curriculum and ideas, provide a real-life perspective to the curriculum, and strengthen programs (Morse, Markowitz, Zanghi, & Burs, 2003). Alumni also delivered a part of the content during the face-to-face training, shared their own story of foster care and aging out, and answered participant questions, which is described in more detail below.

Structure of the Curriculum

The curriculum is divided into: 1) a web-based training, and 2) a one-day face-to-face training.

Web Training

The web-based training delivers information on adolescent development, theoretical material on working with youth, and introduces the concepts of positive youth development, collaboration, culture, and permanent connections to prepare participants for the one-day training. It also includes a case that applies the concepts in a practice setting so that participants can see how this philosophical change operates in practice. The training included the following modules:

- **Theoretical Framework –** This section included ecological and developmental theoretical perspective on working with youth

- **Adolescent Development –** This section included physical, social-emotional, and cognitive changes during adolescence

- **Maltreatment and Adolescent Development –** This section included the effects of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect on adolescents and adolescent development. It further included common manifestations of abuse in adolescence across developmental domains.

- **Four Core Principles –** This section introduced the key concepts of training: positive youth development, cultural responsiveness, collaboration, and permanent connections.

- **Case Example –** This section presented a case that illustrates how the core principles can be used in supervision and practice.

Consistent with adult learning theory (Knowles, 1970), the web-based training served the purpose of getting supervisors to buy-in to the importance of this information. Completion of the web-based training was required to attend the face-to-face training. The web training was developed to take approximately an hour. Participants registered to obtain a user name and password so that they could take the training in whatever progression she/he chose. A participant could leave and reenter the training as much as she/he wanted, but was unable to print the certificate of completion until all training modules and pretest/post-test were complete.

At the completion of training, participants received one continuing education unit and were able to print off a completion certificate.

The web portal that housed the web-based training also served as the over-all project website (*www.palstep.com*). The Supervisor Toolkit, discussed below in greater detail, was added to the website so that as content was added to the Toolkit, the website was continually updated and available to interested persons. This also helped facilitate the transfer of knowledge from supervisors to caseworkers because supervisors could access training resources quickly to train their workers, or could have their workers access the information themselves.

One-Day Face-to-Face Training.
After completion of the web training, participants registered for the one-day face-to-face training. This training was delivered off-site at a hotel by an experi-enced trainer with participation from a former foster youth specialist. One primary goal of this training was for supervisors to understand the unique needs of youth aging out of care, and paramount to this project was the supervisor's acquisition of knowledge and its transfer to workers. Therefore, Knowles (1970) theory of adult learning informed the development and delivery of this curriculum. Several key components of adult learning theory include (1) adult learners must understand they need to know something before they will embrace it; (2) adult learners are self-directed learners; (3) experience has an important role in adult learning and incorporating the experience of the child welfare supervisors is essential to the de-livery of this training; (4) adult learners are prepared to learn new things when they understand the utility of the information to their lives; (5) delivery of information needs to be problem-centered, rather than subject centered; and (6) adults are in-ternally, rather than externally, motivated to learn. Supporting this philosophy, Ver-scheldenn (1993) found child welfare workers learned best from interactive training designs. Thus, learning strategies for the training utilized adult learning theory and principles. This project ensured training delivery was practical, applicable, relevant, and interactive and included several innovating training methods including:

- **Teach Back –** Teach back allowed participants to "teach" (discuss and pres-ent) some content (housing, transportation, physical/mental health, financ-es, community involvement, employment) to other participants. The trainer typically presented one of the sections first to model for them what to do. This method was designed to allow supervisors to the experience of practic-ing the presentation of the material so that they will be more comfortable training their workers.

- **Alumni Involvement –** Youth specialists, who are former foster youth and who have been hired by TDFPS in each region, were involved in the train-ing. The youth specialists presented some content and shared their own experiences, and they were also given the opportunity to discuss regional

community resources available for youth. This also gave participants a chance to ask questions of the youth regarding her/his experiences in and out of care. The evaluation has shown youth participation is the highest rated aspect of the training.

- **Videos and Digital Stories –** The training incorporated three digital stories of youth discussing issues of aging out of care, loneliness, being gay and lesbian in foster care, and sibling separation. A film, *Teach Them How To Fish*, also presented material to supervisors on how to transfer the learning to their caseworkers.

- **Supervisory Tool-Kit –** During training, supervisors were given a CD-ROM that included the PAL-STEP Supervisory Took Kit, which is a collection of materials and techniques supervisors can use to transfer their knowledge to workers once they return to work. This Toolkit also included the entire curriculum, samples of agency documents that were altered to show how the four core principles can be integrated into current practice, and various other resources relevant to the aging out population including adolescent development, gay/lesbian/transgendered and bisexual youth, positive youth development, collaboration, permanent connections, and cultural responsiveness. The Toolkit is also on the PAL-STEP website so that supervisors and workers can access it at any time.

Challenges to Training

Although several potential challenges in implementing a culturally responsive curriculum for supervisors on youth independent living exist, this project encountered few obstacles in implementation. One potential challenge was bringing multiple agencies together with different cultures and missions to work cooperatively towards developing a curriculum for training supervisors on independent living. During the time of our project development and implementation, Texas was also undergoing a statewide emphasis on youth aging out. Our project nicely complemented the work the state was implementing, and therefore we were able to secure good representation from our partners. This emphasis also helped us overcome the potential challenge of overworked supervisors getting time off of work to attend the training. All the regions where the training was delivered had good attendance and participation of conservatorship supervisors. This was especially true in Houston and Dallas where CPS administrators on the Advisory Team put forth extra effort in calling supervisors to encourage them to attend. On the other hand, the state's interest in independent living also made it difficult for us to determine the individual impact of this project versus other efforts going on in the state.

Because our project had a web-based component, another challenge was overcoming potential computer problems related to the delivery of web-based learning. Fortunately, this was minimal. Some problems occurred in the printing of continuing education certificates and logging on to the system, but these were able to be

easily resolved. Our webmaster was very responsive and handled these few com-
puter issues quickly.

   We also anticipated that helping CPS supervisors transfer their knowledge to
their workers once they return to the office would be challenging. To address this,
the curriculum was designed to be as user-friendly and accessible as possible to su-
pervisors. Extensive information, including the curriculum, training materials, sam-
ple case notes, and other relevant information was distributed during the face-to-
face training and was put on the web for easy access for supervisors. The curriculum
itself also included opportunities for the supervisors to practice the knowledge and
skill gained so that she/he could feel more comfortable and familiar with training
their workers. It was our hope that this would facilitate the transfer of knowledge,
although our evaluation reveals that the challenges and overwork many supervisors
experience once they return to the office are difficult to overcome.

   A final challenge was the involvement of youth as partners in the curriculum
development, members of the Advisory Team, and as trainers. We recognized for-
mer foster youth advisors need to be supported in their participation in this project
so they feel comfortable in their role as a participant on the Team. Project investiga-
tors and trainers met with the former foster partners before and after meetings and
prior to all trainings to determine her/his level of comfort, to reassure the alumnus
of the importance and value of her/his participation, and to discuss any concerns
the alumnus may have regarding her/his participation. This helped ease concerns
and in time all of our former foster youth felt more comfortable in their roles. In
particular, the feedback they received from their participation in the training was
overwhelmingly positive, and the Advisory Team easily accepted and welcomed the
experiences of the alumni.

PAL-STEP Evaluation

   A comprehensive evaluation of the PAL-Step training sought to answer four
questions:

- Did the training engage participants?

- Did participants increase their knowledge of the four core principles of
  working with adolescents in foster care?

- Did supervisors transfer their knowledge to caseworkers?

- Did practice change?

Engagement

   To assess engagement, participants were asked to complete a course evaluation
at the end of the day-long training. One hundred and twenty-eight submitted a
course evaluation. The evaluation form asked participants to rate four statements
about the web-based training and seven statements about the face-to-face training

on a 5-point scale where 1="strongly disagree" and 5="strongly agree".

As can be seen in Table 1, the majority of participants viewed the web training components as well organized (92%), interesting (84%), and a good foundation for the face-to-face training (83%). On average, the participants rated the web-based component positively (*M*=4.1, *SD*=.62).

Participants' ratings of the day-long training (Table 2) were higher compared to those for the web based training component. Items related to the trainer's presentation skills were the most highly rated characteristics of the training. Participants agreed or strongly agreed that the trainer presented information in a clear and organized manner (99%), encouraged participation (100%), and was knowledgeable (100%). While all ratings were high, with at least 60% rating the item at the highest level, participants were the least enthusiastic about having sufficient opportunities to practice new skills. The average total rating for the face-to-face training was 4.7 (*SD* =.44).

Almost all of the responses to the open ended question focused on the day-long training. One hundred and four participants identified at least one strong characteristic of the training. Over half of the respondents (58) stated that including the youth's perspective was a powerful element of PAL-STEP. In addition to general responses about youth, many (17) of these specifically noted that having a former foster child involved in the training and sharing his/her experience was important. Others (42) commented that the videos of youth telling their story were important. Nineteen respondents reported that the mix of interactive and other training techniques was a strength of the training. They specifically mentioned group discussion, peer feedback, handouts, and disc to take home.

Table 1: Web-Based Training Items and Participants by Rating (N=119)*

Items	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Presented the information in a clear and organized manner	1%	8%	56%	36%
The material was presented in a way that kept my attention.	3%	13%	48%	36%
The web-based component of the training prepared me for today's session	3%	14%	57%	26%
I feel my time completing the web-based training was well spent.	4%	16%	57%	23%

*Percentages may not equal 100% because of rounding.

Table 2: Face-To-Face Training Items and Participants' Rating (N=128)*

Items	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The trainer presented the information in a clear and organized manner.		1%	26%	73%
The trainer encouraged participation and questions.			25%	75%
I plan to apply what I learned to my specific job situation.		2%	26%	73%
The trainer was knowledgeable about the topic.			27%	73%
The material was presented in a way that kept my attention.		1%	34%	65%
I feel my time in the training was well spent.	1%	5%	30%	66%
There were sufficient opportunities to practice new skills.	3%	6%	31%	60%

*Percentages may not equal 100% because of rounding.

Thirty-eight participants provided suggestions on how the training could be improved. Seven participants suggested having more youth involved in the training, particularly youth who are in care. Nine participants felt the training could be improved by expanding the audience to all CPS caseworkers and two respondents suggested that foster parents attend.

Knowledge Gained

Participant knowledge of the four core principles was measured before and after the web-based training. Ideally the post-test would have occurred after the day-long training. However, time constraints limited our assessment to knowledge gained during the web-based training. One hundred and fifty-four people completed the 15 item test of knowledge before and after the web-based training. On average, participants' scores improved 1.9 points (SD=2.6) from pre-test to post-test. A paired-sample t test was conducted to evaluate whether the increase from pre-test to post-test was more than just chance improvement. The results indicated that the mean post-test score (*M*=11.10, *SD*=2.269) was significantly greater than the mean pre-test score (*M*=9.16, *SD*=1.734), *t*(153)=.-9.311, p<.00). The effect size was n^2=.36.
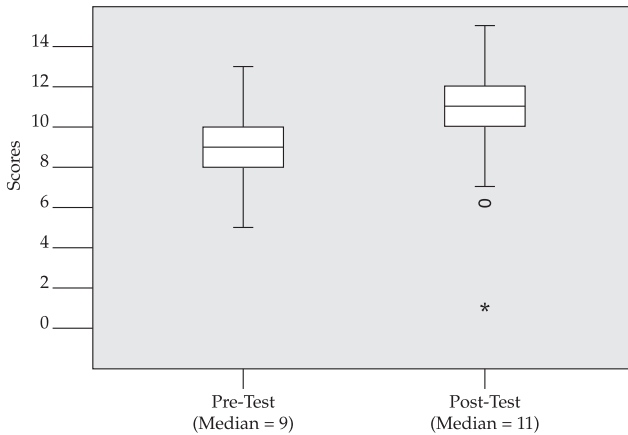
Figure 1: Median Pre- and Post- Tests Scores (N=154)

Transfer of Knowledge

Fifteen supervisors who attended the training and eleven of their caseworkers were interviewed to understand if and how the knowledge gained in the PAL-STEP training was transferred from supervisor to caseworker. In addition, the barriers to integrating the principles into practice, as well as the practice outcomes, were explored.

Supervisors used formal and informal means to transfer what they learned. Seven supervisors reported discussing the training and the four core principles in their unit meeting. One shared that she gave her workers copies of cases and other information from the training manual. The remainder reported sharing the information with their workers informally. For example, an investigative supervisor conveyed the concept of positive youth development by routinely asking workers "what does the teen want to do; what do they think is going on in the home; would they feel safer if we take custody of them". Another supervisor used what she had learned in the training to talk with a worker about stereotyping youth. Using the stories of youth in the PAL-STEP training she was able to paint a picture of the youth's experience.

Barriers to knowledge transfer fell into two categories: work load and belief that workers would learn better in a workshop. While some units were stable with acceptable caseloads, many had high caseloads related to staff turnover. In one unit the supervisor had a caseload of twenty and some workers reported caseloads of 60 and 75. Another reported supervising two units. As one supervisor said, "On the first, 61 cases came to my unit so I had to reassign those, and it's a mad house right now." Several supervisors felt that workers should attend the training. As one stated, "I was a little disappointed that it wasn't open to the workers because I felt the trainer could relate the information much more eloquently than me." Another

supervisor felt that caseworkers would learn better and be more motivated to put the principals into action in a workshop. She suggested that if she were to present the material, it would seem like a "directive."

Supervisors were asked to describe the extent to which their workers had been able to integrate the four core principles into practice and the associated challenges. Two supervisors reported that caseworkers in their units were receptive to the core principals, and specifically, to permanent connection and positive youth development. As one supervisor stated, "They saw it as doing their work better, it helps you with your work."

Case workers also reported that high caseloads were a barrier to integrating the core principles into practice. Several workers identified placement disruptions as a barrier. As one worker stated, "Disruptions are mostly barriers because it affects the child academically, emotionally, and sets them back." Four workers and one supervisor felt that foster parents sometimes hinder incorporating the core principles and they might benefit from participating in PAL-STEP training. For example, one supervisor found that foster parents did not understand the importance of facilitating sibling contact. A worker noted that many foster parents didn't know how to foster decision making in youth. She stated, "Foster parents are accountable to the placement agencies and they let it be known to the child that, well, you know, 'I have to track your every move'." Several supervisors and caseworkers did not see the four core principals as new but rather new names for concepts they were already implementing. One pointed out that positive youth development, collaborating with youth, and fostering permanent connections are central to the structure and process of Circles of Support. Two supervisors noted that cultural competence is a priority across CPS as the agency addresses disproportionality.

Change in Practice

Change in practice was evaluated in two ways. De-identified service plans completed by workers whose supervisor attended training, completed before and after the training, were compared to those of workers whose supervisor did not attend. Service plans were rated by two raters who were blind to the training status of the worker using a form developed for this project. Fourteen characteristics of practice based on the four core principles were rated on a scale of 0=absent, 1= marginal, 2= satisfactory, 3=excellent. For example, indicators of positive youth development included "unique service plan," "strengths based," and "youth participation." Ratings were summed to yield a total score.

Preliminary analysis of the documentation of 16 workers whose supervisors attended training and 15 workers whose supervisors did not attend suggest that both groups' documentation reflected increased incorporation of the four core principles at time two. Further, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups.

In addition to rating service plans, changes in practice were assessed in the

interviews with training participants (both supervisors and workers). Respondents were asked what changes had occurred in practice following the training. Supervisors reported change at both the system level and at the personal level. In one non-metropolitan unit, both the program director and a supervisor attended the training. At a program meeting they decided to focus on permanent connection and re-examine their PMC cases because "preserving connection was so profound." With the assistance from the State Office, they searched for families for youth. The supervisor proudly reported the efforts of her staff and the outcomes. Contact with extended family was initiated for one youth. Another child was connected with her grandmother who is exploring permanent custody. A third youth, who had been having "a really rough time over this past year, just the identity stuff" received information about his parents that, with the assistance of his worker, "helped him put some of the pieces together."

Sustainability of the Training

The curriculum developed, delivered, and evaluated by the project will remain within the state child welfare agency. In continuation of the ultimate goal of training all CPS supervisors on the issues relevant to independent living, this curriculum will become a part of the state's CPS Supervisor Certification program. Those supervisors who are not certified and who do not participate in the project will be required to attend the training as part of their requirements to achieve Supervisor Certification. Supervisors who are currently certified will be encouraged to attend the training as part of their certification renewal. UH-GSSW and UTA-SSW will continue to review and update course offerings in cultural competence, child welfare, and child development. Content from the PAL-STEP curriculum will be infused into appropriate courses.

Another means being used to disseminate the curriculum content is through revised versions for foster parents and caseworkers. Through another grant we have revised the curriculum and directed it to the foster parent and caseworker experience. Foster parents and caseworkers have responded positively to the content and process.

To date, we have participated in five national child welfare related conferences where we have discussed the curriculum and its content. Additionally we have distributed over 400 Toolkits on CD, which is available to the reader on the webpage, *palstep.org*. As discussed, the tool-kit includes the entire curriculum, Power Point presentation, and supporting materials. It is hoped other states will use the took-kit to train child welfare professionals and others who work with youth aging out of foster care.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the PAL-STEP training suggests that it engaged supervisors in the learning process, particularly in the face-face training. Further, participants in the web-based training demonstrated increased knowledge of adolescent develop-

ment and of the four core principles of positive youth development, cultural responsiveness, collaboration, and permanent connection. The findings on the transfer of knowledge are mixed. While many supervisors had formal training for their staff focused on the four core principles, the majority reported a less systematic approach. Specifically, supervisors shared concepts in supervision when the opportunity presented itself. For most supervisors, their workers', and their own case loads, prohibited a planned transfer of knowledge.

A change in practice was more difficult to assess. From the interviews with workers and their supervisors, it was clear that many changes occurred which can be attributed to the PAL-STEP Training. However, it is also clear that all workers, even those whose supervisor did not attend training, are increasingly incorporating the four core principles in practice as demonstrated by their documentation. In Texas, many recent initiatives in child welfare reflect a growing awareness of the need of adolescent youth in foster care and incorporate the four core principles. For example, the Circle of Support is built on the concepts of positive youth development, cultural responsiveness, collaboration, and permanent connection. Disproportionality concerns have raised awareness of cultural responsiveness for all youth in care. Finally, efforts to find children permanent homes have resulted in diligent searches for relatives that have resulted in permanent connections if not always homes for youth. In this context, the PAL-STEP Training is one many efforts which together are changing practice with adolescents.

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