
RESEARCH REPORT

Preparing Teens and Protecting Futures... Preventing Teen Pregnancies within the Child Welfare System

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Abstract

The *Preparing Teens and Protecting Futures... Preventing Teen Pregnancies within the Child Welfare System* project was conducted between May 2015 and May 2016. The project addressed teen pregnancy among youth in residential treatment by implementing Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP) at seven group homes for youth in Polk, Highlands, and Hardee Counties, and assessing the needs of pregnant and parenting teens in care through the Child and Family Service Review process. The Teen Outreach Program is a nationally recognized, evidence-based program that has proven to be effective in decreasing teen pregnancy and school failure. Quantitative analysis of the results of TOP revealed an extremely high attrition rate among foster youth that presented unique challenges, as compared to previously studied populations. Nevertheless, attendance at TOP sessions proved to be a predictor of decreases in behaviors associated with poor academic outcomes. The teen pregnancy rate was reduced by nine percent for this subsample. Implications for future implementation among youth in foster care are discussed.

Baseline data was gathered regarding pregnant and parenting teens in the Department of Children and Families Circuit 10 in central Florida using the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) protocol. A convenience sample of teen parents residing in Polk County was interviewed in depth to better understand their experiences and needs.

Preparing Teens...Protecting Futures Project Evaluation

The Preparing Teens... Protecting Futures Project had two primary goals: 1) to reduce the incidence of teen pregnancy in foster care by implementing an evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention program; and 2) to improve outcomes for pregnant/parenting teens and their children by implementing a practice model based on case review research conducted through this project. The Children and Family Service Review process was used to assess the needs of teens currently in the foster care system in Circuit 10. The evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention curriculum selected for implementation was the Wyman Teen Outreach Program (TOP). This paper reports on the outcomes of the pregnancy prevention program and the case review process.

Pregnancy Prevention Program Description

Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP) is a nationally recognized program designed to address school failure and teen pregnancy among adolescents age 12 through 18. The program has been rigorously evaluated and is listed among top evidence-based programs for addressing teen pregnancy (Parkway and Rockville, n.d.). It seeks to foster a sense of competence, autonomy, and prosocial attitudes and behaviors in teens through a development program involving supervised community service, classroom based discussions regarding service experiences, and the key social developmental tasks of adolescence (Allen, Philliber, Herrling, and Kupermine, 1997). TOP typically runs for nine months and involves a minimum of 25 weekly meetings in school-based settings, and a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer service.

Method

Heartland for Children used an adaptation of the Teen Outreach Program in order to accommodate the more transient population of youth in foster care settings and delivery in group homes rather than schools. The adaptation allowed for delivery over a seven-month time period, during which the minimum 25 educational sessions and 20 hours of community service were to be completed.

Facilitators at Healthy Start were hired in late August and attended the first available Wyman training seminar in late September. Delivery of the program began in mid-October of 2015 at eight group homes in Polk, Hardee, and Highlands Counties. All youth in residence at any of the group home settings between October 2015 and May 2016 were encouraged to participate in the program or "club". Informed consent for participation was obtained for all youth in residence. Facilitators held weekly meetings in each of the seven homes, helped youth find appropriate community service learning opportunities, and collected data for the project. One of the initial facilitators left Healthy Start at mid-year, requiring that another facilitator be hired to take her place in January.

Sessions lasting 120 minutes were held once weekly at each of the seven homes selected. The first hour was typically used to cover educational topics and the second hour was used for planning and implementing community service learning projects. The curriculum is packaged in four levels for each developmental stage from 6th to 12th grade. Although each facilitator was responsible for choosing appropriate curriculum from the

extensive list of options, Heartland facilitators agreed collectively that each of the homes should have comprehensive coverage of topics related to pregnancy prevention during the abbreviated time available. Session topics varied slightly across clubs, but the most frequently occurring session topics were selected from available topics on relationships and sexuality in the Level 4 curriculum. Level 2 topics also frequently focused primarily on relationships and sexuality. Although Wyman reports that only 15% of the extensive discussion topics directly address sexuality, facilitators' post-program surveys indicated that approximately 44% of the topics covered in meetings were chosen from the relationship and sexuality sections. The other most frequently selected topics for discussion focused on goal-setting, clarification of values, and introductory and closing activities. Other potential themes for discussion emphasized the developmental tasks of adolescence more broadly, including self-understanding, friendships, developing life-skills, dealing with family stress, and communication.

An essential element of the Teen Outreach Program model is the inclusion of a Community Service Learning (CSL) component with significant participant input in design, planning and implementation.¹ As a result of staff turnover, implementation of the service learning component was delayed until February, limiting the number of hours students were able to complete by May. The average number of CSL hours completed by youth taking both the pre- and post- survey was 22, which met the minimum requirement for fidelity to the program; however, individual participation ranged from a low of 2 hours ($n = 1$) to a high of 30.17 ($n = 3$). The clubs/homes were each given opportunities to select and plan the service learning activities. Between February and May, the homes participated in a variety of volunteer activities including:

- helping to clean out a warehouse at Lake Wales Care Center, a faith based and coordinated community approach to helping families
- forming a team to collect money to address the needs of cancer survivors
- coordinating an Easter egg hunt for community children
- making dog toys to sell at a breast cancer event, with the proceeds going towards cancer research
- setting up signs and sorting t-shirts for distribution at the cancer relay
- making cards for people in homeless shelters, their parents, and loved ones
- making and selling homemade ice cream at a community history event
- helping to deliver birthday cakes to people who were elderly and painting picture frames as gifts.

Measures

The pre-survey that students completed at the inception of the program is a brief self-report questionnaire designed by Wyman that includes a section for demographic information and a section to identify problem behaviors, self-efficacy, and prosocial attitudes. Previous research has validated the reliability and validity of self-report measures for assessing adolescent problem behaviors (Elliot, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989; Farrington, 1973;

¹ See Appendix 1 for Tips on Constructing Quality Community Service Learning Activities

Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984, as cited by Allen, et al., 1997). Due to the lack of consistent access to computers at the various group home settings, a decision was made to have students complete paper copies of the surveys and for Healthy Start Coalition staff to enter the information in the Wyman system.

Demographics The pre-surveys request information regarding students' grade in school, race, predominant household composition (during most of their years growing up rather than current living situation), and parents' education levels (on a scale ranging from less than high school to college graduate).

Problem behaviors The pre- and post-surveys ask students to report whether during the previous academic year they had 1) failed any courses; 2) received failing grades on their report card; 3) been suspended from school; or 4) cut any classes. Students are also asked to report whether they have ever 1) been pregnant or responsible for a pregnancy, or 2) had a baby or fathered a baby.

Social Learning The surveys also ask students to indicate the degree to which they agree with statements regarding their personal sense of competence and pro-social attitudes on a Likert scale with 1 representing "No! Not at all!" and 4, "Yes! Very much!" Students respond to a set of six statements regarding their ability to work out problems, accomplish goals, and attitudes towards others. The statements include the following:

- a) "I can work out my problems if I try hard enough."
- b) "It's easy for me to stick to my plans and accomplish my goals."
- c) "I can usually handle whatever comes my way."
- d) "I like to see other people happy."
- e) "Most people can be trusted."
- f) "There is some good in everybody."

Safety and Belonging The post-surveys ask students to reflect on the extent to which they had a sense of safety and belonging in the TOP group. Students respond to eleven statements using the same 4-point scale used for social learning. They include statements such as the following:

- a) "When I am at TOP, I can say what I think and talk about my life."
- b) "I feel safe (physically) during TOP meetings."
- c) "TOP facilitators care about me."
- d) "TOP facilitators understand me."
- e) "TOP facilitators support and accept me."
- f) "I learned new skills during my community service projects."

Other statements included in this measure can be viewed in Table 4.

Settings

Eight group homes were initially chosen to participate in the TOP curriculum; however, adjustments in the delivery sites were made in response to circumstances surrounding the highly transient nature of the population. An early decision was made to eliminate Florida Baptist's Porch Light, which serves teens rescued from human trafficking, due to the fact that there were rarely more than three teens at this home, and their stays

were often relatively brief. Hansen House closed temporarily at the inception of the program and therefore did not begin TOP related activities or community service hours until March 2016. This home, therefore, was eliminated from the final data set.

Educational sessions were held weekly at seven homes including Serenity, Sheriff's Youth Villas, Covenant Chadwick, Covenant Corvina, Integrity, George Harris, and Anchor House. The number of meetings held ranged from a low of 13 at Hansen House, which was closed for part of the year, to a high of 33 at Integrity. The majority of clubs reported having 31 to 33 meetings by the end of the academic year. The largest numbers of participants were residents of Integrity (37%, $n = 11$), which included three homes, followed by Anchor House, Youth Villas and George Harris (13.33% each, $n = 4$).

Participants

Between October 2015 and May 2016, 127 youth in the participating group homes attended at least one session in the Teenage Outreach Program administered through Heartland for Children; however, the majority of youth were not in residence at pre- or post-testing. Sixty-five (65) students in residence in the participating group homes in October of 2015 took the pre-survey. Youth who came in to care after the program had begun were allowed to take the survey up to four weeks after program inception. In May 2016, 63 students in residence took the post-survey, including late joiners who had not taken the pre-survey. Of 127 youth participating at some point during the academic year, 98 took either a pre-survey or a post-survey, indicating that 29 students entered care too late to take the pretest and left before the post-survey was administered. Only 30 participants completed both the pre and post-survey, resulting in a remarkable attrition rate of 69.4%, not including those who were enrolled at some point but did not participate in either of the program assessment measures. To put this into context, a frequently cited study evaluating the efficacy of TOP reported an attrition rate of only 5.3% in the Teen Outreach group and 8.4% in the control group (Allen, et al., 1997). The fact that the attrition in the current study was 13 times higher than in the high school population previously studied attests to the highly transitory nature of placements in the group homes, and the unique challenges for program outcomes.

Transience varied across the group settings. For example, the George Harris home, considered a temporary shelter for youth in transition, had 45 students enrolled in the program at some point, but only 3 program completers. Anchor House had 24 youth enrolled, but only 4 of these completed both the pre and post-survey. Nevertheless, for youth completing the program, club membership did not emerge as one of the predictors of change from pre to post-survey.

The majority of students taking either a pre- or post-survey were in the 9th or 10th grade (37%), male (54%), and White (34%). Table 1 compares the sociodemographic characteristics of the residents who participated in the pre-survey with those who completed the study by taking both the pre and post-surveys. A comparison of demographic factors between those taking the pre-survey and the 30 who completed both, indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between groups ($p = .672$). Because the post-survey does not collect demographic information based on the assumption that it has already been gathered in the pre-survey, the sociodemographic characteristics of those who took only the post-survey was not available.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants and Final Sample

	Participants completing a pre-survey (n = 65)	Participants completing pre and post-survey (n = 30)
Grade in school		
Sixth	6.15%	10.00%
Seventh	15.37%	13.33%
Eighth	12.31%	16.67%
Ninth	18.46%	20.00%
Tenth	18.46%	26.67%
Eleventh	16.92%	10.00%
Twelfth	12.31%	3.33%
Gender		
Females	46.15%	40.0%
Males	53.85%	60.0%
Race/ethnicity		
Black	21.54%	13.33%
White	33.85%	40.00%
Hispanic	21.54%	30.00%
Other*	23.08%	16.67%

* Multi-racial, Haitian, Unknown, or Undisclosed

Results

Data Analysis

Study data were analyzed through the application of a series of descriptive, associative, inferential, and predictive statistical techniques. Preliminary analysis of the data set involved focus upon the assessment of missing data, and internal consistency of participant response. Both *Expectancy Maximization (EM)* and *Multiple Imputation (MI)* were utilized to assess the extent and randomness of missing data. Specifically, the application of Little's MCAR test was utilized to test for randomness of missing data. Internal consistency (reliability) of participant response was assessed through the application of *Cronbach's Alpha (α)* for both pre-test and post-test conditions of the study. An additional F-test was utilized to evaluate the statistical significance of internal consistency of response finding.

Descriptive analysis of study data featured the use of measures of central tendency, variability, and percentages for comparative purposes. Inferential analysis of pre-test to post-test data

comparisons centered on the application of both the *t*-test of Dependent Means and the Wilcoxon Rank-Sign Test, depending upon the normality of data distribution. Data normality was determined through the application of the Shapiro-Wilk Test. The Chi Square *Goodness of Fit Test* was utilized in instances in which demographic sample comparisons were made for statistical significance of difference. Associative and predictive analytics featured the use of correlation coefficients, and Binary Logistic Regression. Both the statistical significance of the predictive ability of independent variables and their subsequent odds ratio (*ExpB*) were expressed through the use of the Binary Logistic Regression technique.

Preliminary Analyses

Little's MCAR analysis indicated that missing survey data were sufficiently "random" in nature ($\chi^2 = 12.623$ (19); $p = .857$). The survey items for social learning and safety and belonging were also analyzed for internal consistency of participant response. The responses showed an acceptable level of internal consistency for the pre-survey items and a high level for participant response on the post-surveys; $\alpha = .58$, $p < .001$, and at post-test, $\alpha = .77$, $p < .001$.

Problem Behaviors At baseline, students in the sample had high levels of academic problem behaviors, including failed courses, failing grades on report cards, school suspension, and cutting classes. The pre-survey indicated that 23.3% ($n = 7$) of students had failed a course; 46.7% ($n = 14$) had failing grades on report cards, and 46.7% ($n = 14$) had been suspended from school. Twenty-seven percent ($n = 8$) admitted to cutting classes. Of students completing the program, at pre-survey, two males had fathered a baby and one female reported having two previous pregnancies. The greatest change was seen among African American participants. While 28.6% of African American students reported either having "caused a pregnancy" or experiencing one, none of the African Americans at post-test reported a pregnancy.

Unexpectedly, school related problem behaviors tended to increase rather than decrease at post-survey, although the changes were not statistically significant. Having or causing a pregnancy decreased by 6.7% and failing grades on report cards remained the same. Table 2 represents the changes.

Although the findings did not suggest improvement in problem behaviors between pre- and post-survey, regression analyses illustrated the importance of two related elements central to the program: percentage of meetings attended and total meetings attended. Higher attendance at meetings decreased the likelihood of failing grades $p < .05$, cutting class, $p < .001$, and suspension from school $p < .05$. Using the "odds ratio" (*ExpB*) element of the Binary Logistic Regression analyses, it was interesting to note that as students increased their number of "total meetings" by one full unit of measure, their likelihood of being suspended from school decreased by nearly 70%. Having failing grades on report cards also decreased by nearly 70%. Similarly, as attendance increased by one percentage point, students' likelihood of reporting that they had cut classes decreased by nearly 80%. Although weak, there was an inverse relationship between meeting attendance and targeted problems (r range = $-.067$ to $-.224$). Table 2 indicates percentages of students reporting problem behaviors and the degree of change from pre- to post-survey.

Researchers also compared the full baseline available of all participants who completed the pre-survey ($n = 65$) with those

who completed both the pre- and post-survey ($n = 30$). There were no significant differences between the scores of the non-completers with the completers at baseline. Changes from pre to post when comparing the two groups were not statistically significant.

Previous research has demonstrated clear linkages between student problem behaviors at entry and exit and sociodemographic factors. Relationships have been found between problem behaviors and gender, racial/ethnic minority status, and grade in school. Therefore, the interaction between demographic characteristics and problem variables was examined using logistic regression. Consistent with previous research, males evidenced higher levels of academic risk behaviors. Males in the study were 77 times more likely to have failing grades than females ($p = .008$), 21 more times likely than females to be suspended ($p = .015$), and 17.5 times more likely than females to cut classes ($p = .039$). This is noteworthy, given the fact that while only 20% of the population in the national study reporting significant decreases in problem behaviors was male, 60% of the final sample in the current study was male.

In the omnibus comparison of pretests, of all participants completing a pre-survey ($n = 65$) to those completing the program ($n = 30$), female participants demonstrated a statistically significant decrease in “problem behaviors” overall ($t(4) = -7.583$; $p = .002$), while males showed a statistically significant increase in problem behaviors. ($t(4) = 2.749$; $p = .048$). This suggests that had the population more closely resembled the sample of the national study, more significant findings may have been evident.

Interactions were also found between students’ grade level and program participation. As student grade level increased by one level, reported “Hours of Community Service” decreased by 1.74 ($p = .032$). Similarly, as student grade level increased by one level, “Percentage of Attendance at Meetings” decreased by nearly 3% ($p = .036$) and “Total Meetings” decreased by 1.13 ($p = .015$).

While attendance at meetings appeared to have significantly contributed to the likelihood of a decrease in problem behaviors, it did not predict a decrease in reported pregnancy — most likely a result of the small number of cases involved. Nevertheless, 10% of the participants ($n = 3$) reported having or causing a pregnancy during initial assessment, compared to only 3% ($n = 1$) at the end of the program.

Compared to the program completers, among participants who participated in the pre-survey ($n = 65$), 14% reported having been pregnant or causing a pregnancy. Four females had been pregnant, two more than once; and five males had “caused a pregnancy,” three multiple times. Of the nine students, only one female had given birth, while three male students reported having fathered a baby.

Table 2: Problem Behaviors at Pre and Post-Survey ($n = 30$)

Problem Behavior	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	% Change
Failed Courses	23.3% ($n = 7$)	30% ($n = 9$)	+6.7%
Failing Grades on Report Cards	46.7% ($n = 14$)	46.7% ($n = 14$)	0%
School Suspension	46.7% ($n = 14$)	56.7% ($n = 17$)	+10%
Cutting Classes	26.7% ($n = 8$)	36.7% ($n = 11$)	+10%
Pregnant/Cause a Pregnancy	10% ($n = 3$)	3.3% ($n = 1$)	-6.7%

Social Learning

A comparison of pre and post-survey results on the social learning survey items indicated there were no statistically significant changes over the course of the program. The mean change across survey items was .06, ($t = .798$; $p = .461$). Table 3 reports the means for each of the items. A score of 4 indicates that the youth agreed “very much,” while a score of 1 indicated that they agreed “not at all.” The means on the first three items measure students’ sense of competence in decision making and handling problems; the fourth captures empathy/pro-social attitudes; and the last two assesses their sense of trust in others.

Results of the pre-survey on social learning indicated a surprising level of optimism regarding participants’ confidence in their abilities to accomplish goals and handle problems. For example, at baseline, 100% of respondents indicated they agreed “somewhat” (55.17%) or “very much” (44.83%) with the statement, “I can work out my problems if I try hard enough.” While the overall changes from pre- to post-survey were not statistically significant, when the top two categories were not combined, there were significant increases between pre- and post-survey in the number of participants who responded they could work out their problems ($p = .012$) and stick with their plans ($p = .025$) “very much.”

In contrast, students were far less confident both at pre- and post-survey that other people could be trusted. Nearly 73% indicated people could be trusted either “not too much” (41.38%) or “not at all” (31.48%). Considering the histories of youth in residential settings, their responses regarding whether or not people can be trusted appeared to be consistent with their life experiences. In comparison, their confidence in their own abilities reflects their need to rely on themselves when adults in their worlds have proved to be less than trustworthy. Changes from pre- to post-survey on this item were not statistically significant; however, they did move in the desired direction, as negative responses decreased by nearly 10% overall.

Logistic regression was used to determine whether there were any predictors of program outcomes. Three indices of program intensity: 1) number of meetings attended; 2) percentage of meetings attended; and 3) number of hours of volunteer service were examined. Significant effects were found for meeting attendance, but not for volunteer service. Results of the repeated measures analysis suggested the only variable that significantly impacted changes in this area was attending at least 27 meetings (mean increase = 1.33; $t = 4.00$; $df(2)$; $p = .05$). Students who attended more meetings were also more likely to

show positive increases in their agreement with the statement that they could handle problems “very much.” In addition, these students showed significant levels of change from pre- to post-survey on the statement, “I can work out my problems if I try hard enough” ($t = 4.00$; $df (2)$; $p < .05$) and “there is good in everyone” ($t = 4.00$; $df (2)$; $p < .05$). Similarly, those who reported 94% attendance at meetings were more likely to respond affirmatively to the statements, “It is easy for me to stick with my plans and accomplish my goals” ($p < .05$).

Although demographic characteristics did not emerge as predictors of post-survey responses, an exception was students who reported that they had lived primarily with their mother and father. These students were more likely to see positive changes in their response to “I can easily handle what comes my way (mean increase = .89; $t = 2.87$; $df (8)$; $p = .021$), as well as “There is good in everyone” (mean increase = .78; $t = 2.80$; $df (8)$; $p = .023$).

Table 3: Social Learning

Social Learning Statements	Pre-Survey Mean (SD)	Post-Survey Mean (SD)	Mean Change*
I can work out my problems if I try hard enough	3.44 (.51)	3.41 (.77)	-.03
It is easy for me to stick with my plans and accomplish my goals	3.38 (.62)	3.34 (.85)	-.04
I can easily handle what comes my way	3.34 (.61)	3.00 (.93)	-.34
I like to see other people happy	3.41 (.57)	3.24 (.83)	-.17
Most people can be trusted	2.00 (.96)	2.14 (.94)	+.14
There is good in everyone	2.97 (.82)	3.10 (.79)	+.13

*All values not statistically significant

Safety and Belonging

At post-survey, respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements regarding the extent to which they experienced a sense of safety and belonging through their participation in the TOP group. For 8 of the 11 items, more than 90% of youth reported they agreed either “very much” or “somewhat” with the statements. On average, over 50% of students responded they agreed “somewhat” to the safety and belonging statements. Table 4 shows the means for each of the statements and percentages agreeing somewhat or very much. The percent of agreement across all questions was 92.33% with an average mean of 3.28 ($SD = .071$).

Several of the items on this scale were intended to assess how students perceived the community service aspect of the TOP program. Regarding planning the community service activities, the majority (93.50%) agreed that they had been involved in planning activities, although 57.81% indicated they had been only “somewhat” involved. The majority (92.19%) said that through their participation in volunteer experiences, they had learned new skills as well as how to deal with challenges. More than a third of these (37.50%) specified they had learned how to deal with challenges “very much.”

Almost 93% of the teens responded that they at least somewhat enjoyed the community service activities. Many of those (44.44%)

said they enjoyed it very much. When asked about whether they felt that they had made a difference in the lives of others, 57.81% of the youth said they somewhat had made a difference. A third (34.30%) said they felt they had “very much” made a difference.

Table 4: Safety and Belonging

Safety Statements	Mean (SD)	% Very Much/Somewhat
When I am at TOP I can say what I think and talk about my life	3.23 (.85)	87.5%
I feel safe (physically) during TOP meetings	3.34 (.74)	87.5%
TOP facilitators care about me	3.33 (.94)	92.19
TOP facilitators understand me	3.33 (.85)	94.75
TOP facilitators support and accept me	3.33 (.79)	95.24
I feel like I belong to TOP; it is a positive group of teens for me	3.19 (.96)	89.06
I enjoyed the community service part of TOP	3.37 (.85)	93.65
I learned how to deal with challenges during my community service projects	3.30 (.74)	92.19
I helped plan my community service projects	3.14 (.62)	87.50
Community service projects helped me make a difference in other's lives	3.25 (.62)	92.19
I learned new skills during my community service projects	3.27 (.67)	92.19

Discussion

Implementation of the TOP with youth in residential settings was expected to have a significant impact on youths’ risk of academic failure and pregnancy, and to increase their sense of self-efficacy in accomplishing goals, making decisions, and having positive connections with others. While the results of pre- and post-survey results were disappointing in their failure to yield statistically significant outcomes, analysis of quantitative as well as qualitative data imply some positive findings and suggest some directions for future implementation. Analysis of the results also revealed a number of overwhelming obstacles to achieving the types of outcomes that have been reported in school settings over the last 30 years (Allen, et al., 1990). Future efforts to implement this type of program with teens in care will require that these obstacles be substantially addressed.

The most promising finding from this analysis was that attendance at meetings predicted lower risk for academic problem behaviors. Although pre- and post-survey outcomes overall did not reveal significant changes in the targeted outcomes, attendance at meetings was positively correlated with decreases in failing grades, cutting classes, and suspension, and increases in social learning. This may suggest that had students been exposed to the program over the typical 9-month period, stronger outcomes might have resulted. Previous research findings indicate that classroom sessions meeting at least once weekly during a full academic year led to positive outcomes (Allen et al., 1990).

This finding is on some levels good news/bad news for future implementation because the principal obstacle to program fidelity and completion was the transience of the population, which made sustained attendance a significant challenge. The fact that of 127 youth who participated in at least one session, only 30 were able to complete the program by taking both a pre and post-survey, reveals the extent to which the group home settings impacted placement stability. Only 23% of participating youth (30) were in care long enough to complete the program and only 5 of the 127 (3.9%) attended 100% of the TOP meetings. Given the fact that attendance at meetings was the only factor that predicted positive outcomes, this finding has substantial implications for future implementation of the program. While transience was anticipated and some efforts were made to adapt the program by shortening it from 9 to 7 months, the level of attrition was extraordinary.

Facilitator post-program surveys were examined for clarity regarding the reason that the majority of enrollees had not completed the program. Although the facilitator post-program survey required a response to a question regarding why students were not participating at the end of the program year, the choices were more applicable to school settings (teen dropped out of school, moved to another school, broke club rules, unknown, other). This section was not completed at all for five of the group homes; of those completed, the majority were marked "unknown," although two students had been adopted and five were reported to have "moved to another community or school." Placement instability varied across settings, but no differences on program outcome measures were noted based on club membership.

Because previous research using the TOP model has been conducted exclusively in school settings, differences in the population served and program delivery should be considered. One of the challenges of evidence-based practices is that the conditions under which practices are evaluated may not be able to be replicated in specific practice situations. It is likely these differences may account for the lack of clear outcomes observed in the current study.

The most frequently cited study for the TOP involved a rigorous experimental design which evaluated the TOP at 25 different high school sites across the nation (Allen, et. al, 1997). The most notable difference between the two populations, i.e., placement instability, has already been addressed. While the population studied had a 5% attrition rate, the current study had a 70% attrition rate if students who had either a pre- or post-test are considered, and an 80% attrition rate if all students enrolled during the academic year are taken into account. This had a significant impact on the sample size, reducing the study's power. This also had implications for program delivery. Given the fact that an essential part of TOP is creating a sense of belonging and safety, it is impossible to assess the impact that the constant ebb and flow of participants in the program may have had on the participants' ability to develop the necessary environment for optimal results. Theories of group development would suggest the constant turnover in the population prevented the type of group cohesion that would have made it possible to foster the safety and sense of belonging required for students to experience the kind of personal growth expected. The importance of this cannot be overstated.

Another important issue involved the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. While previous research has indicated that students with the highest risk may show the greatest gains from the TOP, demographic characteristics have also been linked with differential program effects (Allen & Philliber,

2001). Given the different sizes of the populations studied, it was not possible to compare the two groups statistically; however, the current study's sample differed in important ways from the national study population. Given the finding of a strong correlation between male gender and problem behaviors and the significant improvement noted among female participants, the fact that 60% of the youth in the current population were male, compared to less than 20% in the national study, bears consideration. Furthermore, in the national sample, nearly 70% of the study population was in grades 9 and 10, compared to 47% in the current study. Since lower grades predicted greater attendance, this may have also had some bearing on program outcomes.

An additional question regarding the current study is whether in comparison with programs previously studied, the current program had sufficient exposure to the critical program elements to achieve the desired "dosage effect." Although 20 hours is the minimum number of hours required by TOP, students in the national study completed an average of 46 hours of volunteer service. In comparison, students in the current study averaged 22 hours, or less than 50% of the community service learning hours that clearly demonstrated positive effects on problem behaviors and social learning (Allen, Philliber, Herrling, & Kuperminc, 1997). Because the volunteer service is an integral part of the program delivery, it is clearly possible that had youth had greater opportunities to participate in community service learning, program effects may have been more evident.

During interviews with facilitators and an art director responsible for implementing the volunteer activities, it was clear that the benefits of the volunteer experiences among the youth were accruing over time. The dominant theme that emerged was that students had the opportunity to develop empathy and to see themselves as "making a difference" in the lives of others. Students empathized with the elderly, with individuals who had lost loved ones to cancer, and with children they were serving directly or indirectly. For example, one facilitator reported that one group of girls said that they thought the elderly they were making blankets for would feel "happy because it was a surprise," and that the gifts would "make them smile and bring happiness." When asked how they felt about working on the projects, they said it made them feel "warm, happy, and unselfish." This is consistent with previous research on the program that indicates that the community service learning opportunities put participants in a "help-giving as opposed to help-receiving role," and that the program works by enhancing students' sense of autonomy while helping them maintain a sense of relatedness with peers, facilitators, and other adults (Allen et al., 1990; Chinman & Linney, 1998; Rappaport, 1987; Riessman, 1965, as cited in Allen & Philliber, 2001).

TOP facilitators reported the youth liked doing something for other people and during the closing session of TOP, the participants were upset about not being able to do more community service. One facilitator described this as a "snowball" effect: the more community service they did, the more excited they were for what they would do next.

A final observation that can be made from the data collected is while the topics covered at meetings focused heavily on relationships and sexuality, the TOP is intended to work through a "*broadly targeted* developmentally-focused prevention program" (Allen & Philliber, 2001). The combination of volunteer service and a curriculum which includes communication skills, assertiveness, values clarification, goal-setting and decision

making, is intended to facilitate discussions regarding future life options. The heavier focus on adolescent sexuality may have inadvertently diminished the expected educational gains.

Implications

Further research is necessary to determine whether a briefer, more intensive adaptation might facilitate more positive program outcomes. The transience of youth in residential care settings is a significant obstacle that requires innovative strategies in order to maximize program benefits. A particular challenge will be finding ways to increase volunteer service opportunities with briefer interventions. However, there is an argument for the fact that less can be more, when accompanied by ample time for reflecting on lessons learned. Facilitator surveys indicated students had an opportunity to reflect on their volunteer experiences only “somewhat.” The community service learning guide exercise checklist, which listed seven CSL project planning exercises, and five reflection exercises was checked only once for one club, suggesting that little meeting time was devoted to planning and reflecting on service projects.

Van Goetham, Van Hoof, Orobio de Castro, Van Aken, and Hart (2014) propose the role of reflection is vital to reinforce the effects of community service on adolescent development. In a meta-analysis of 48 studies, the authors emphatically stated there is no effect of community service activities when adolescents do not have appropriate opportunity to reflect on the activities. Specifically, they suggest that *frequency* of reflection is important, as it helps youth to internalize the lessons learned.

In summary, future programs will need to make adjustments realistically with the specific challenges of youth in residential care in mind. Increasing student exposure to meetings and community service may increase the “dosage effect” for youth participating in the program. Furthermore, ensuring fidelity to the program model by providing sufficient time for reflection on volunteer experiences and a broader, more developmentally focused curriculum may increase positive program outcomes. Appendix 1 includes recommendations for increasing the benefits of volunteer service among youth.

While previous implementation of the TOP program has shown it is even more effective with high-risk youth (Allen & Philliber, 2001), transience is an issue that has not been addressed. This is a formidable challenge when attempting to address teen pregnancy as it places youth in double jeopardy. Placement instability has been linked to sexual risk taking, substance abuse, and higher rates of teen birth in youth in and aging out of the foster care system (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010; James, Montgomery, Leslie, & Zhang, 2009; King, Putnam-Hornstein, Cederbaum, & Needell, 2014; Prentky et al., 2014; Stott, 2012).

According to Kim Daugherty of Heartland for Children, Inc., patterns of placement breakdowns within the Heartland system reveal disruptions most often occur as a result of the youth’s extreme behavior problems and or difficulty in getting along with other youth in the group home. While unplanned moves occur less frequently among younger children, ‘teenage’ placements have a 50% chance of breaking down.

Daugherty noted five factors related to frequent placement moves: 1) a change of case manager; 2) overly optimistic expectations for the placement; 3) overly restrictive policies that discourage teenagers from having freedom to experience normal

teenage experiences, such as cell phone use; 4) the teenager’s level of emotional disturbance; and 5) the teen’s motivation to remain in the placement. Frequent moves can cause additional trauma and significantly impact the youth’s educational progress and hinder their ability to develop healthy relationships with adult caregivers who can offer them safety and acceptance. It is not fully understood whether placement moves themselves produce poor outcomes or whether poor outcomes are related to the teenager’s previous trauma experiences and difficulties.

Daugherty notes each placement breakdown needs to be carefully explored to determine the contributing factors, and careful consideration given to identifying a subsequent placement that can meet the teenagers’ unique needs. Developing strategies for minimizing placement instability, mitigating negative effects on this vulnerable population, and exploring alternate methods for the successful implementation of programs such as TOP need to be explored. Staff at Heartland for Children have already made decisions to implement an intensive program adaptation in the coming academic year over a four-month period as opposed to the seven-month period utilized. Efforts to begin the community service learning experiences immediately upon inception of the program in order to allow for greater exposure to this important element of the TOP program are also underway. Finally, considering the number of enrolled participants who did not take a pre- or post-survey, a decision has been made to allow enrollees to take a pre-survey regardless of when they enter the program. Differential effects based on program entry and “dosage” can be better compared in this way.

Children and Families Services Reviews on Pregnant and Parenting Teens

This section addresses the case review process for those teens in Highlands, Hardee, and Polk Counties who were pregnant or parenting between May 2015 and May 2016. Although the high risk of unplanned pregnancies among teens in and aging out of the foster care system has received national attention (National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2009), the actual prevalence of the problem is ambiguous due to lack of reliable data gathered from state to state (Gotham, 2005). The Children and Family Services Review (CFSR) process is used by the Children’s Bureau to collect information regarding the state of children in the child welfare system and to make recommendations for improvement in services. Therefore, the CFSR process was used to gather baseline information regarding prevalence and current needs of pregnant and parenting teens in Circuit 10 of central Florida.

Between September of 2015 and August 2016, there were 26 parenting teens in care in Circuit 10. Eighty-one percent of the teen parents retained custody of their children, although 33.3% had substantiated reports of child maltreatment. Many of the teens had “aged out” of the system and were no longer receiving Independent Living Services. Parents still in care or receiving Independent Living Services were much more likely to be pursuing educational goals. Twelve of the parenting teens (46.2%) were either in high school, adult education, or working on their GED, while those who had “aged out,” or were no longer receiving Independent Living Services, were not enrolled in any type of educational setting.

Although Heartland for Children established a goal that 75% of teen parents would complete the TOP curriculum, it was not anticipated that so few of them would be in residential care. Of the parenting teens, only one young man who had

fathered a baby, completed the program, although there were eight participants who indicated they had become pregnant or fathered a baby.

Sixty-nine percent of the teen moms received documented medical care, compared to 100% of the five teens interviewed. None of the babies born during the year had been exposed to drugs.

Qualitative Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with five teen parents in the care of the child welfare system in Circuit 10 in central Florida, utilizing the CFSR Online Review Instrument. This review was used to help determine baseline information regarding the experiences and needs of pregnant and parenting teens. The interviews were qualitatively analyzed using a content analysis process, noting commonalities among the pregnant/parenting teens. Suggestions follow for addressing the needs of pregnant and parenting teens in the child welfare system.

Of the five adolescent females, between the ages of 16 to 19 who were interviewed, two were Black, two were Bi-racial, and the other Caucasian. The teens came into the care of the child welfare system for various reasons, including substance abuse, neglect, and abandonment. Two were pregnant with their first babies, two had their babies with them in group care, and one had lost custody of her son twice due to substance abuse and exposure to domestic violence by a boyfriend. Two of the young women were on their second pregnancies, but one had miscarried.

Dominant Themes

Dominant themes that became evident through the interview process were a history of placement instability, trauma, academic failure, juvenile delinquency, family history of teen pregnancy, and inadequate knowledge and access to birth control. The mothers also reported having conflictual relationships with the men in their lives, including fathers, stepfathers, and boyfriends. The following themes emerged from the interviews:

Placement instability The young women had experienced a minimum of three placements, with one of the respondents experiencing at least 11 placement changes. Each girl had been in foster care and group care and the majority had been in some type of independent living program.

History of trauma The trauma which all of the teens experienced was severe and chronic. Domestic violence was present for four of the five young women, with two teens already experiencing domestic violence at the hand of their babies' fathers. Physical abuse by stepfathers or mothers' paramours was a common experience and one teen had been physically abused by her mother since age one.

Law violations by teen mothers All of the teen mothers in this study had criminal charges against them. Three were charged with battery. Other crimes included shoplifting, criminal mischief, parole violations, petty theft and illicit drug use.

Relationship issues with families and or babies' fathers Four of the teens spoke of having no relationship or extremely poor relationships with their fathers. Most of the girls had also had abusive encounters with stepfathers or mothers' paramours.

Only one teen continued to be in a relationship with her baby's father. Likewise, only one teen had close contact with a sibling.

Educational histories Though four of the young women were aged 18-19, none had graduated from high school. One had accomplished high school equivalency. Educational issues included having low standardized test scores, dropping out of school, attending alternative school for behavioral issues, and being unsuccessful with taking the GED.

Sex education and history of teen pregnancy in families Eighty percent of the girls had some history of teen pregnancy in their families. All had become sexually active by the age of 15. Most stated they had available sex education and or contraceptives, though the sex education was very basic. One knew about birth control, but did not know where to access it.

Lack of support The teen moms experienced inconsistent offers of assistance from the child welfare system. One teen parent lived in an adolescent girls' group home, which she felt had been no help at all with her pregnancy. Another teen had been referred to Healthy Start, but could not get to the agency; thus, she cancelled appointments several times. Alternatively, one youth was able to obtain good prenatal care due to a group home's commitment to good medical services.

Recommendations for Practice

Treatment for effects of trauma Child welfare systems should offer trauma-informed specialized parenting interventions for adolescent parents in foster care (Schelbe, McWey, Radey, Canto, & Holtrop, 2015). Possible trauma interventions include: Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Treatment, which includes: "psycho-education, parent skill development, relaxation, affective modulation, cognitive reprocessing, and re-creation of trauma narratives, in vivo practice and safety planning" (Cohen & Mannarino, 2008, as cited by Racco & Vis, 2015, p. 124). Other possible interventions could include Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Yoga, and Art in Therapy.

Placement instability There is high cost associated with placement instability, which may include more placements in foster care, higher rates of pregnancies, lower age of initiating sexual activity, and less use of contraceptives than the general population (Stott, 2012). Therefore, foster and group home caregivers should be trained regarding identifying and addressing issues that are likely to ignite placement disruptions. Additionally, efforts should be made to create appropriate, earlier interventions and or more intense interventions to prevent disruption.

When necessary, respite may be provided to caregivers and or adolescent parents, in order to temporarily relieve pressure for adolescents, caregivers, and other children in the placement.

History of juvenile justice involvement If an adolescent parent has been physically abused, there is increased likelihood that the physical abuse will be perpetrated on others, including their children (Kim, 2009). Treatment for physical abuse may include "targeting the externalizing behaviors, attempting to increase prosocial behaviors and improve peer interaction, and improving familial and peer interactions, which may lead to improved self-image and self-efficacy, indirectly decreasing depression and anxiety symptoms" (Kim, 2009, p. 746). Additionally, parenting classes for adolescent parents may help them to learn appropriate, non-violent means of discipline.

Educational histories Having a high school diploma predicts higher earnings (Okpych & Courtney, 2014). Knowing this, adolescent parents should be assisted with developing a plan for educational success. It may be necessary to stabilize the youth in the school system. When youth have moved into foster care or moved around in foster care, case managers must be aware of federal guidelines that encourage the youth's ability to remain in the same school and be willing to advocate, if necessary. Youth in child welfare should be informed of their options regarding education, careers, and job preparation. Furthermore, aptitude tests may be beneficial to help youth to determine a career path.

Building support networks Because there may be a poor support system for young mothers in foster care, there may be need to locate significant sources of support to help adolescent parents address the challenges of being a teen and parenting a child (Sadler et al., 2007). School-based teen parent programs may provide support that is difficult to find outside of school and those programs might be filling in for difficult mother-daughter relationships (Sadler et al., 2007). A study on social support for youth aging out of foster care found almost 70% of the participants stated they had a mentor who was an important person in their life, other than their parent or guardian, who had taken a special interest in them and who they could count on (Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010). When youth identified program personnel, foster parents, or Department of Social Services workers as their mentors, they described long term, consistent ties with regular contact over the years. The key characteristics of these mentors were acceptance of the youth, encouragement and reliability, no matter what was needed. Some had relatives who were mentors, such as grandmothers, aunts, and older siblings who they had known for most of their lives. Having a mentor has been found to be significantly related to having less homelessness and more completion of GED or degree programs (Collins, Spencer, & Ward, 2010).

Sex education Age appropriate sex education is necessary for all children in the child welfare system. Child care workers and caseworkers cannot assume a youth has had sex education by a certain age or that the sex education contained all of the essential components for youth to make sound decisions regarding their sexuality. All persons who are working with preadolescents and adolescents in a child welfare system need to have a comfort level with having necessary, open conversations regarding sexual matters. Good educational sources regarding addressing sexual issues with adolescents in the foster care system can be found at numerous websites, such as the site for The National Campaign (2016). This website has publications such as 10 Ways to Address Teen Pregnancy among Youth in Foster Care.

Caregivers and case managers should remember that children in the child welfare system may have experienced sexual abuse and or inappropriate sexual boundaries in the homes in which they have resided, thus they may confuse sex and love, due to the messages they have received throughout sexually abusive encounters. Counseling concerning sexual abuse should address age-appropriate healthy sexuality.

Healthy pregnancies and healthy teen parents Regularly scheduled communication/staffing is essential among all parties working with teen parents in the child welfare system in order to best support the youth. It would be helpful to coordinate parenting classes for pregnant/parenting youth. Because these youth often lack social support and may benefit from communicating with other teens in similar situations, foster care systems may

consider having a centrally located ongoing support/education group for those youth in the custody of the child welfare system who are pregnant and/or parenting. A teen parents' group's purpose may include: engaging teenage mothers in a socially inclusive experience that might challenge the social disapproval they often experience, enhancing the mother-infant bond, as well as increasing feelings of parental efficacy and enhancing the social context of the teenage mother by reducing stress, social isolation, and intergenerational family conflict (McDonald, et al., 2008, p.45). Additionally, teen parents in foster care should be prepared for successful childbirth experiences that protect the health of mother and child. It would be beneficial for the young mother to attend labor/delivery classes with a supportive birth coach. Finally, as they move towards independence, teen parents would benefit from financial responsibility classes, emphasizing budgeting.

Implications for Further Research

Following a five-year demonstration project with teen parents in group care in New York, researchers discussed obstacles that make research with this population challenging (Lieberman, Bryant, Boyce, & Beresford, 2014). The researchers proposed a four step research model for future research with this population: 1) gleaning preliminary descriptive data; 2) building a theory of change; 3) process evaluation of service delivery (i.e. monitoring program services, including self-reflections by clients); and 4) quasi-experimental designs/randomized controlled designs. It was recommended that research with teen parents should begin with an assessment of baseline characteristics of the clients.

The information gathered in both the qualitative and quantitative portions of this project with teen parents is consistent with the first step of the four-step model proposed by Lieberman, et al. (2014). Having gathered preliminary descriptive data, and developed a better understanding of the challenges involved, the next step would be beginning to build a theory regarding the types of services and support that will foster positive changes in the outcomes experienced by parenting teens and their children.

Conclusion

Overall, the Protecting Teens Project brought to light some of the significant issues faced by youth in the foster care system and the barriers that exist in providing effective interventions and services. It also provided some direction regarding potential adaptations for future programs that might be able to mitigate the transience of this population by providing a shorter more intensive intervention. The youth who were interviewed for this project provided insight to some of the important issues which need to be addressed with youth in foster care who are pregnant and parenting. Many of their discussions and suggestions may simply reinforce knowledge regarding this subject, while others serve as a reminder of some of the dire needs of this population. Systems of care need to continue to be vigilant to help prevent pregnancies among adolescents in care. However, when pregnancies occur and children are born, best practices should be maintained, in order to defend the futures of both the adolescents and their children.

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Appendix 1

Tips on Constructing Quality Community Service Learning Activities

(From Denner, Coyle, Robin, & Banspach, 2005, pp. 153 – 155)

1. Find appropriate service learning sites:

- Use sites that are large enough to accommodate 10-15 youth
- Find sites that offers one-on-one interactions
- Sites should be flexible enough to accommodate changes in schedules and the youth that attend
- Locate community service sites that want volunteers
- Sites should offer a range of service activities
- Offer meaningful interactions among students, staff of agencies, and clients/students
- Have a contact person at the service site, who provides guidance on tasks

2. Create staff support at the community service site

- Get buy-in from service-site staff
- Clarify goals and expectations with the service site/staff
- Consider an agreement concerning dates of service and tasks the youth will be expected to complete
- Create a tip sheet for site staff
- Emphasize to the facility/program the benefits to the youth

3. Maintain appropriate youth participation and behavior (Students' preconceptions affect their level of engagement in service)

- Know in advance the rules and expectations of the service sites and communicate these to the students
- Have a clear protocol for dealing with inappropriate behavior
- Discuss preconceived ideas that youth may have
- Conduct empathy activities
- Identify tasks or activities for future visits to a site
- Attempt to establish a low adult leader to student ratio
- Role play potential challenging situations before the service activities
- Provide students with specific tasks

4. Reflect on Service-Learning Experiences

- Have students reflect in groups
- Discuss *why* events occurred during service activity
- Additionally, design youth reflection books that require short answer responses and that are written in a fun, graphic format
- Consider having youth to work in pairs to reflect on the activities
- Have youth think before the activities about how they hope to make a difference
- Ask youth afterwards about the rewards from completing the services
- Facilitators should use teachable moments during the services to help youth make the connection between volunteering and the overall content of the program that they are in (i.e. reducing sexual risk behaviors)

5. Address student self-images

- Help students to see the value of their contribution
- Have 1 or 2 youth to watch for positive contributions of a given youth to share these observations at end of the service activity
- Facilitate a small-group reflection activity, focusing on identifying youths' contributions
- Have a formal recognition activity at the end of the teens' service activities