Supervisor Training to Support Principle-Driven Practice with Youth in Foster Care
Children’s Bureau’s FOA: Training of Child Welfare Agency Supervisors in the Effective Delivery and Management of Federal Independent Living Services for Youth in Foster Care

- Published in 2005
- Developing, implementing, evaluating and disseminating training curricula for public child welfare agency supervisors
- Goal – strengthen supervision provided to child welfare staff working with older youth in FC or ILPs
- Emphasized: positive youth development; collaboration; cultural competency; permanent connections
Grants awarded to six organizations

- University of Houston (Texas)
- Hunter College School of Social Work (New York)
- University of Louisville (Kentucky)
- State of Massachusetts, Department of Social Services (Massachusetts)
- San Francisco State University (California)
- University of Iowa (Iowa)
Grant Parameters

• 36 months
• Grantees required to provide a 25 percent match (cash or in-kind)
• Evaluation was required (both within program and participation in cross-site evaluation); process and outcome elements
• Target Population – “Public child welfare agency supervisors with supervisory authority over caseworkers assigned to work with youth in IL programs.”
Key Program Interventions and Activities

- Flexibility enabled grantees to design what would work best in their communities
- Focus groups to inform curriculum development
- Face-to-face training (single day to sessions spread over 6 months)
- Some used web-based training supplement
- Community Days
- Day long Youth Summit
Theory of Change

Increasing knowledge and awareness among child welfare supervisors and workers through new materials and trainings will result in increased utilization and application of skills and knowledge, which should, in the long term, result in organizational changes that support youth-focused frontline practice that incorporates Independent Living components” (Lyon and DeSantis, 2008).
Process Evaluation Findings

- Texas, Kentucky, Massachusetts and California all exceeded their initial targets for numbers of supervisors to be trained.
- All grantees reported high levels of satisfaction among training participants.
- Integrating the youth perspective into the training curriculum appeared to have a strong influence on trainee satisfaction ratings.
Outcome Evaluation Findings

- Test scores across all six grantees suggested that supervisors experienced moderate positive knowledge gains in the areas of youth development and transition planning (Knowledge change)
Outcome Evaluation Findings – NY & MA

- Positive changes reported in the ways in which supervisors engaged with their staff after participating in training, particularly with regard to transition and permanency planning services (Supervisory practice change)
  - Participants provided with an opportunity to learn from and share with other supervisors
  - Gained tools to enhance and improve supervisory skills
  - Increased awareness of resources for youth aging out of foster care
  - Increased feelings of empathy for youth
  - Renewed focus on adolescents and permanency
Knowledge Transfer Findings– Texas

- Measured the transfer of youth-centered practice knowledge and skills from supervisor to caseworker
  - Qualitative interviews reviewed transfer of knowledge through formal and informal means
    - Discussed youth development in unit meetings, case supervision and casual conversations
  - Compared caseworker documentation for those whose supervisors attended training to those who did not
    - no significant changes found (small sample size, variations in case documentation)
Knowledge Transfer Findings - California

- Survey of 58 caseworkers whose supervisors attended training
  - 82% reported that supervisors encouraged collaboration among workers to identify youth resources
  - 35% indicated an increase in encouragement months after training
  - 81% indicated that supervisors used unit meetings to allow caseworkers to share success stories involving best practices
  - 53% reported an increase in supervisors encouraging them to focus on the child’s future, anticipate needs and set goals
Knowledge Transfer Findings - Iowa

- The only grantee to measure knowledge transfer from a youth perspective
- Compared interview data from 2007 youth cohort (transition planning before training) to data from 2009 youth cohort (transition planning after introduction of training)
  - 2009 youth reported transition planning process was more helpful and informative
  - 2009 youth reported more contact with their workers, being listened to more often, being challenged to develop their skills and goals, and feeling empowered to play a greater role in planning for their futures.
System Level Changes – TX and CA

- TX – one agency assigned a caseworker as the “permanent care worker” whose duties involved assisting youth exiting the foster care system
- CA – e-conferences in Fresno County which facilitated collaboration among youth and CW professionals in casework planning and decision-making.
Limitations in Interpreting Findings

- Grantees did not use experimental research designs, which limits the ability to identify causal relationships between changes in behavior and supervisor training programs.
- Several training programs were implemented in the context of broader systemic changes to State CW systems.
Lessons Learned

• It is essential to include and engage foster youth in designing and implementing CWT/ILS training programs.

• Building relationships with child welfare administrators and community partners can facilitate the implementation process.

• Online access to training materials facilitates ongoing training and information dissemination to broader audiences.

• Expanding the target audience for IL services training can further address the needs of youth transitioning out of foster care.

• Rigorous methods for measuring the transfer of knowledge and skills must be developed for future evaluations of supervisor training programs.
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