

underdog DREAMS: Improving Long-Term Quality of Life Outcomes for Foster Youth and Families



Cohort:
2016-2019

Team Members:
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Location:
Orlando, Florida

Focus Areas:
Behavioral and Mental Health
Violence & Trauma

Background

As of October 2016, there were an **estimated 437,465 children in foster care**, with **five as the average age of entry**, and **20.1 months as the average duration in care**. Foster care includes all children who have been removed from their homes due to neglect, drug abuse and many other contributing factors. Studies have shown that more than 90% of foster youth in the child welfare system experience trauma compared to 70% of children and youth nationally. Trauma-exposed children and youth are at higher risk for experiencing a host of difficulties throughout life. Kaiser Permanente's Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study found a strong relationship between exposure to abuse or household dysfunction during childhood and multiple health risk factors later in life. As of May 2018, 24,390 children and youth were residing in Florida's foster care system. Reacting to large caseloads, child deaths and political pressure, a 1996 state statute mandated the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) to privatize foster care. The lead agency model, referred to as Community Based Care (CBC), was adopted statewide despite a lack luster attempt to vet four other pilot models. As of March 2005, the statewide transition to privatization was complete with 20 lead agencies providing child welfare services. In

2016, the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for the state of Florida Department of Children and Families found that the state was not in substantial conformity with meeting the educational, physical and mental health needs of children being served in Florida.

Wicked Problem Description

Florida and Kansas are the only two states that have fully privatized their states welfare systems. 13 years after fully implemented statewide privatization, Florida's child welfare system is still plagued with large caseloads, child death, poor physical and mental health, and dismal educational outcomes. With lead agencies (CBC) contracting out services and managing more than 500 sub-contractors, services as well as the converging systems involved (courts, schools, etc.) are often siloed. Additionally, foster parents, child welfare professionals, judges, teachers, mental health providers and mentors are often inadequately prepared to provide evidenced based interventions needed to improve outcomes and promote resiliency among foster youth and families.

Foster Youth Facts and Figures:

- Nationally, only 50% of foster youth graduate from high school.
- Nationally, 50% of the homeless population spent time in foster care.
- 50% of foster youth are incarcerated within 2 years of "Aging Out".
- 80% of inmates incarcerated in the U.S. prison system have spent time in foster care.
- Foster youth are diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) at 6x the general population and 2x the rate of veterans returning from war.
- Foster youth are estimated to lose 4 –6 months of academic progress per move.
- 65% of children in foster care experience 7 or more school changes from elementary to high school.
- Only 1–3% of foster youth graduate from college by age 26.

Project Strategies

[underdog DREAMS](#) is a response by an interdisciplinary team of health care professionals to the dismal lack of real-life solutions and support available to Florida's foster youth. We exist to provide foster youth, some of the most vulnerable members of our society, the opportunity to imagine the possibilities, see a future filled with purpose, and live with intention. We do everything we can to meet foster youth where they are –from psychosocial education to experiential learning activities, from mentorship to group counseling. **In everything we do, we are guided by these three principles:**

1. We believe in the value that every foster child and youth brings to any community they are a part of.

2. We believe that every foster child and youth deserve a thorough and thoughtful approach to their physical and mental health care.
3. We believe technology is an enabler that allows us to reach children. underdog DREAMS focuses on three strategic categories to impact the lives of foster youth in the state of Florida: Education, Mental and Physical Wellness and Technology.

Current:

Education

- Formalized community partnership with First Star Central Florida Academy (FSCFA), University of Central Florida (UCF) and Community Based Care of Central Florida (CBCCF).
- Hosted Foster Care Month Celebration & Fundraiser Event at Topgolf Orlando which highlighted the \$42,000 sponsorship of underdog DREAMS to FSCFA.
- Worked with Florida State College of Medicine to train approximately 400 Child Protective Investigators on Behavioral Health / Substance Abuse and provided ongoing reflective supervision.
- Facilitated four Poverty Simulations with UCF College of Education and Human Performance.
- Presented at the National Council on Family Relations Conference, UCF Urban Education Leadership Summit, Florida Public Health Association Conference (Most Innovative award) and Valencia College.
- Facilitated Experiential Learning trip to Washington, DC with 2 foster youth. Met with and educated Florida representatives to Congress on the state of foster care in Florida.

Mental & Physical Wellness

- Partnered with Florida Psychological Associates, LLC to implement an evidence-based standard of care protocol rooted in trauma-informed CBT, utilizing tele-psychiatry to ensure continuity of care and access to child and adolescent psychiatry.
- Successfully launched First Step Care, LLC in Orlando, FL to expand the above model of care to foster youth in the Central Florida region and beyond.

Technology

- Used technology to partner with remote professionals such as those at CRD Associates, 120 Design Studio and Armstrong, Fleming & Moore to deliver innovative and engaging curriculum to youth.

Future:

Education

- Strengthen partnerships with FSCFA, UCF and CBCCF and expand services to larger coverage areas.
- Establish decentralized Learning Communities and access to consistent tutoring services.
- Conduct Florida Foster Youth Academic & Wellness Cognitive Impact Study (FAWCI).
- Create underdog DREAMS Child Welfare Standard of Care Practice Manual and Recommendations.

Mental & Physical Wellness

- Establish community partnerships to increase youth and caregiver access to physical fitness and nutrition education.
- Conduct survey of foster youths' medical records to improve physician engagement.
- Expand tele-psychiatry, cognitive testing and behavioral health services in the Central Florida region.

Technology

- Establish corporate partnerships to develop and launch innovative applications to enhance foster youth educational outcomes and close the achievement gap.

Outcomes

- Disseminate the underdog DREAMS Child Welfare Standard of Care Practice Manual.
- Launch the replicable underdog DREAMS Foster Youth Academic & Wellness Program to states across the country.
- Publish results of the Florida Foster Youth Academic & Wellness Cognitive Impact Study (FAWCI).
- Successfully graduate current cohort of participants and identify future cohort's participants.

Completed Outcomes:

- Completed underdog DREAMS Job Readiness & Leadership Boot Camp Survey –15 participants
- 75% felt that "Since boot camp I have had the chance to use knowledge gained from boot camp".

- Hosted Foster Care Month Celebration, \$42,000 sponsorship donation to FSC Central FL.

Timeline

Q1 –

- Obtain IRB approval for FAWCI

Q2 –

- Secure corporate partnerships and resources to be utilized in the underdog DREAMS Foster Youth Academic & Wellness Program
- Establish foster care awareness through CEU training, workshops, and speaking engagements
- Begin foster youth medical record review project

Q3 –

- Perform FAWCI
- Complete and begin dissemination of underdog DREAMS Child Welfare Standard of Care Practice Manual

Q4 –

- Analyze data and publish all findings and recommendations
- Implement comprehensive mental health program to foster youth at First Step Care, LLC

Partnerships

- First Star Central Florida Academy – Dr. Deshawn Chapman, Site Director; Academy and Post-Doctoral Associate for UCF College of Education and Human Performance
- University of Central Florida Foundation – Curtis Proctor, Associate Director of Advancement
- Community Based Care Central Florida – Gerry Glenn, CBC Chief Legal Officer

Evaluation Strategies

An external evaluator from a local university will review the action steps and measurable outcomes outlined above. The selection process for the evaluator is in place now. The anticipated start date is January 2019 to coincide with the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.