



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA
COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL
& COMMUNITY SCIENCES

Strategies for Assessing and Intervening with Youth who Run Away from Foster Care Placements



Kimberly Crosland
Ruby Joseph

Webinar Goals

- Historical Context
- Pilot Study
- Current Research & Results
 - Why youth run
 - Assessment (Interview) to determine reasons why youth run
 - Interventions to decrease and prevent further running (stabilize youth)



Background

- Over 50% of children in foster care (and the child protection system) have clinically significant emotional or behavioral difficulties (EBD) (Burns, 2004)
- Drug use among alumni of foster care is higher than general population (White, O'Brian, White, Pecora, & Phillips, 2008)
- Youth with EBD in the foster system may be experiencing placement change rates that average 4+ per year (Clark, Lee, Prang, & McDonald, 1996)

Background cont.



- Educational achievement is low (75% of children in foster care perform below grade level (Weinberg & Kimm, 2004))
- 2/3rds of youth in foster care repeated one or more grades
- Only 39% complete 12th grade and only 2.3% of male youth in foster care attend college
- Poor employment outcomes

The Runaway Problem

- A common and serious problem associated with placement disruption and elevated risk
- Highest rates of running:
 - Youth between 12-18 years old
 - Girls > Boys
 - Youth with MH or SA problems and histories of placement instability





- When youth are “running,” or missing, they are at higher risk for perpetrating crimes, contacting drugs/alcohol, or being victimized
- Many of the tragic, “horror” stories occur when foster youth are on the run
- The reasons for youth running are numerous

Interventions?

- What are current Interventions?
 - Adding Diagnoses
 - Medications
 - Talk therapy
 - Contracts
- We have piloted a **behavior analytic approach** to reducing runaway behaviors (Clark, Crosland, Geller, et al., 2008)
- Currently researching this approach further under a newly funded IES grant

Purpose of Pilot Study

To determine if a function based intervention would be effective in decreasing run away behavior

Functional Assessment

- What do we mean by a function based approach?
- How would we conduct a functional assessment of running away?

Function-Based Approach

- Functional Assessment
 - Interviews: Functional Assessment Youth Interaction Tool (FA YIT); record reviews
- Types of Questions
 - How questions are asked
 - Who interviews youth



Function-Based Approach

- Interventions

- Individualized on basis of assessment information and dependent upon context, case workers, and circumstances

- Could include: Preference assessments, contingency contracts, Living arrangements, training and consultation for foster parents, guidance and coaching for caregivers, enriched activities, school involvement, etc.

Case Example of Functional Assessment Results - Katrina

- Thinks her group home is unfair with discipline – play favorites
- They just don't seem to care (e.g., they won't let her have favorite snack with her school lunch)
- When she runs, she often tries to visit her little brother
- Would rather live with a single female parent
- Anxiety about what would happen to her at 18 – No one has prepared her for “independence”
- Would like to make some money so she could have some special things of her own

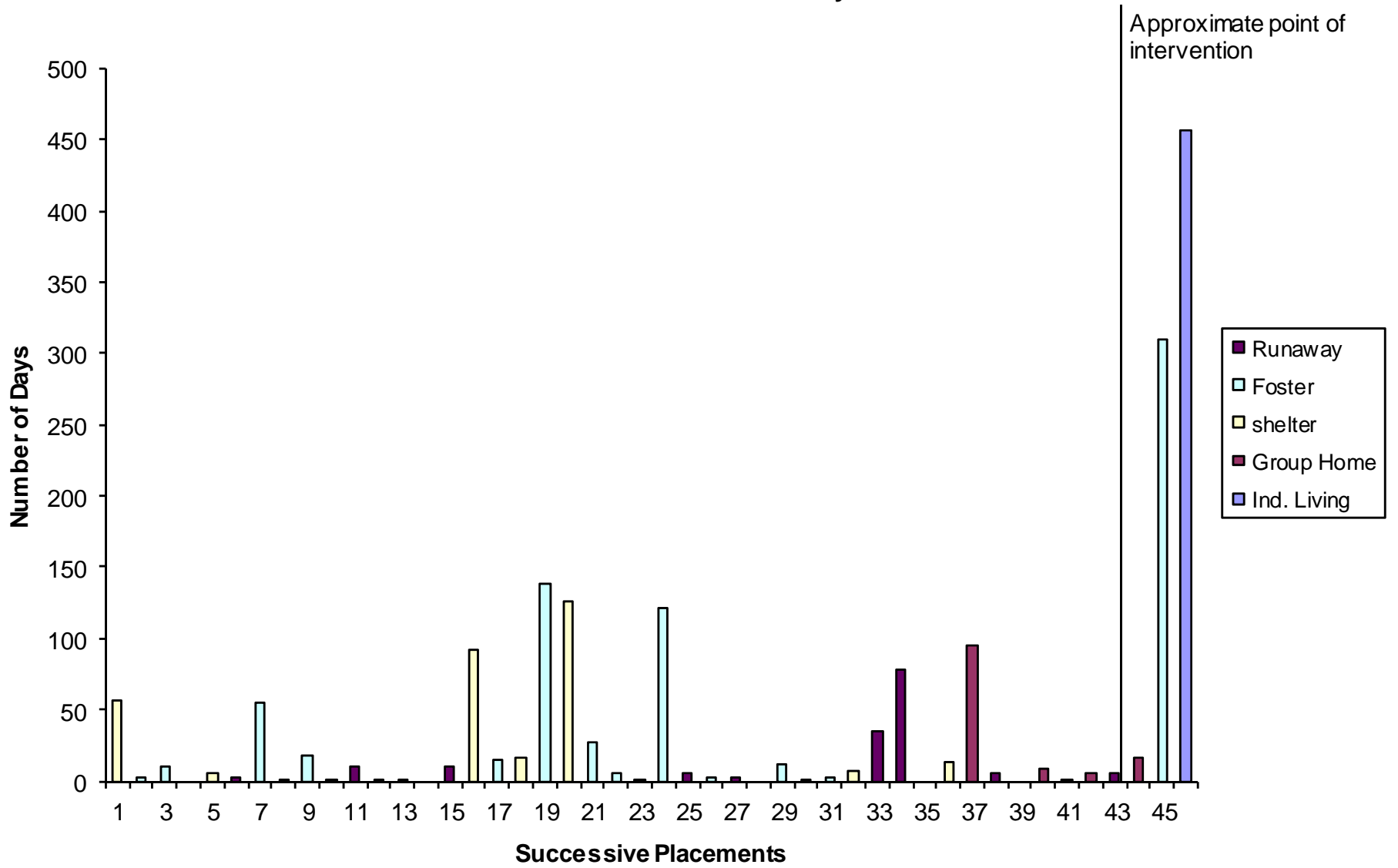
Main Functions of Katrina's Running

- Escaping group home
- Accessing brother
- Also, pay attention to context around functions (finding out what type of placement she would like, evaluating strengths, etc.)

Case Example of Interventions Based on Run Functions - Katrina

- Explored with group home personnel (Staff Training) to address fairness issue & caring (e.g. lunch favorites)
- Arranged for consistent visits with brother around preferred activities
- Encouraged her to return to group home while exploring alternative living arrangements. Found better living arrangements with single trained mother.
- Explored with her about what type of work she might want to do. Found a suitable job.

"K" - Placement History



**Level of
Setting
Normalcy** **K**

Independant Living

Foster Home

Group Home

Shelter

Runaway

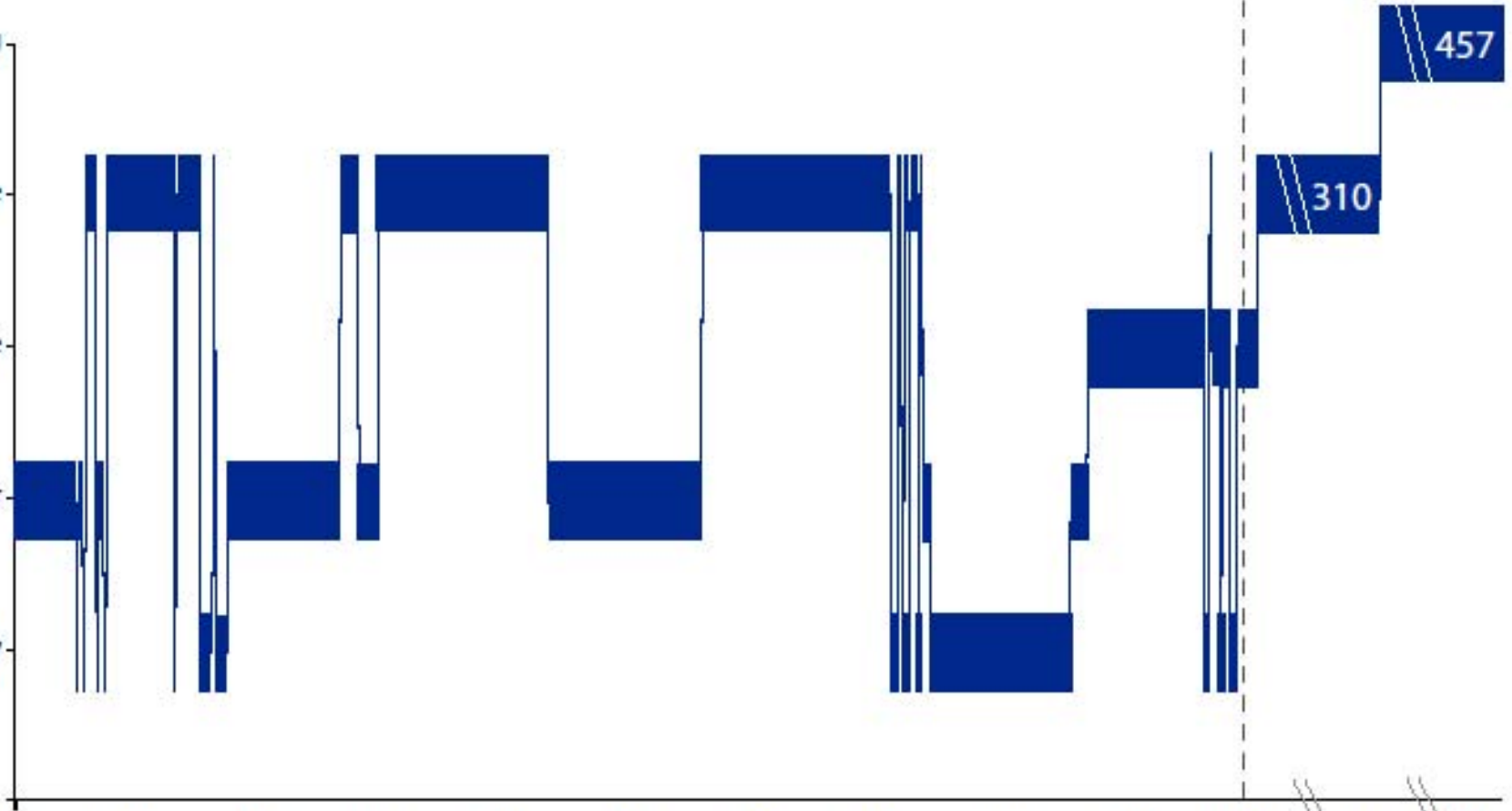
BASP

457

310

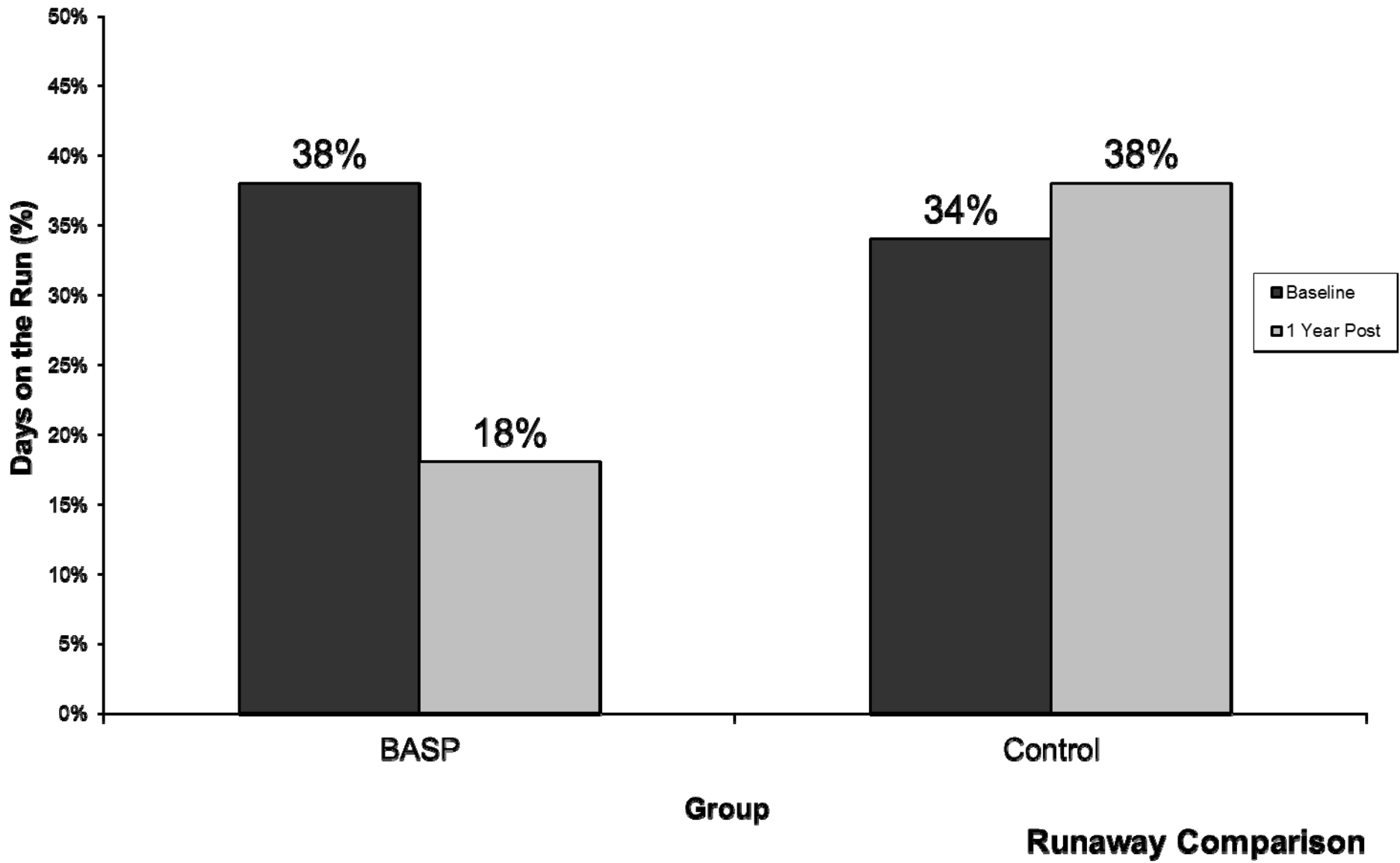
0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 900 1000 1350 1777

Days



Group Study: Matched Comparison Design

- Data from state database on youth in foster care
- 13 intervention participants
- Matched comparison youth:
 - 3 matched comparison youth for each participant, all from same data base (for a total of 39 matches to provide additional statistical power (Hennekens et al., 1987))
- Matching based on (1) gender, (2) age at first run; (3) ethnicity, (4) lack of extended incarceration – and availability of data
- Principal dependent variable = % days on run



Funded Grant to Expand Research (RUN Grant)

- Three-year Development Grant Funded by Institute of Education Sciences (IES)—Grant R324A110180
- RUN goals
 - Refine FA-YIT to ensure it is applicable and effective when used within the Child Welfare system and by these personnel
 - Manualize this function-based assessment and model for intervening with youth in foster system who runaway from placements
- Anticipated outcomes/results
 1. Reduce unsafe days for foster youth
 2. Increase placement stability
 3. Improve youth educational outcomes

Phase I – Assessment Focus Groups

- 2 sites-14 focus groups (7 per site)
- Participants- Child Welfare, School Staff and Youth who have run away
 - 2 lead child welfare CBC providers and their subcontract agencies:
 - 2 school districts:
 - 4 administrators; 4 direct care, 6 youth groups
 - 3 groups of youth/young adults within each CBC: (13 to 15; 16 to 17; 18+)

Sample Focus Group Questions: Youth/YA

1. Can you tell me about what the situation was like before you ran away?
 - Was/is it a sudden decision or something that has been building up for a while?
2. What are some of the reasons that you decide to run? Where did you go?
3. What do you need most when you return from running?

Sample Focus Group Questions: CW

1. What are some of the reasons why youth run?
2. When youth are on the run, is there a way that you can get in touch with them to check on their safety? What methods work best? What methods don't work?
3. When they return from a run, what are the types of questions youth should be asked upon return?
4. When gathering information from youth after a run, what are some suggestions you would make regarding how questions should be asked to make youth feel comfortable and willing to share about their experience?
5. What are some ways in which child welfare and schools can work together

Sample Focus Group: Schools

1. Can you describe you or your school's interactions with the child welfare system?
2. What things work well in your interactions with child welfare personnel? What things don't work well/could be improved?
3. Are there things your school currently does to prevent or minimize runaway behaviors
4. When students return to your school after a run, what processes do you use to get them reinstated and how do you support them?

Reasons Why Youth Run

- Escaping From Something
- Running To Something (Access)

Reasons Why Youth Run

- **Escaping from:**

Strict Rules – curfews, polices and rules regarding visiting family, friends, or attending functions and events

“Just because of curfews. Like they wanna go have fun with friends and it's so strict in foster care, you have to be home at a certain time. You really can't do anything. Like the foster care I was in, you have to be home at dark, okay? Dark means seven o'clock. I'm a teenager!” (Youth 18+)

Reasons Why Youth Run

- Escaping from:

- Loss of freedom and independence

"I came from havin' parties, goin' out, havin' fun, and then (here) , you can't do anything. You're in the house or you get called in as a runaway."

(Youth 18+)

- Other youth in foster or group home or staff they don't get along with; hostile living conditions

Reasons Why Youth Run

- **Running to:**

- Regain a sense of normalcy

- Be closer to family, friends, school and community

- Engage in normal teenage activities- football, homecoming, attend parties

Reasons Why Youth Run

■ Running to:

- Be with a person they trust
- Get caseworker's attention and get their needs met

"I've had kids say ...the only way I can get their attention, to get them to come out and see me and talk to me and take care of my needs, is if I run"
(Frontline Staff)

- Engage in illegal, harmful activities (do "drugs"-marijuana and other substances, drink alcohol, smoke)

"And sometimes you'll run away to go get drugs. That's what I did" (Youth 13-15)

- "Runner's High"-to feel the excitement and adrenaline rush

"...you get an adrenaline rush from it" (Youth 13-15)

Child Welfare and School System Findings

- Inadequate collaboration
 - Delays/challenges in getting youth enrolled in school following new placement
 - Sporadic collaboration in providing comprehensive supports for runaway youth when they return
 - Confidentiality Issues/Sharing of Information
 - Often individual-specific
 - High turnover of CW staff
- Need to develop more formal, stronger collaborative processes with identified contacts in both child welfare and education systems to ensure integrated supports and resources for runaway youth

FA-YIT and Agency Assessment Findings

- Youth need some space and time to calm down before participating in any type of assessment process
- Assessments such as the FA-YIT should be administered in a safe, relaxed, neutral, non-threatening environment
- The interview questions should be open-ended, and the interview should be relaxed and conversational, preferably conducted by someone with whom the youth has a rapport or someone the youth trusts
- Personal qualities of interviewer: Caring, empathetic, sincere, non-judgmental, trustworthy
- Youth need to feel as though they are a part of the process and are being heard
- Better follow up and accountability should be integrated into intervention plan based on assessment process

New Assessment Tool

- Functional Assessment Interview for Runaways (FAIR)

Phase II: Interagency Facilitated Workgroups: Intervention Development



- Combined child welfare and school personnel workgroups to identify a wide array of possible intervention strategies that can support youth who run away (academically, socially, behaviorally)
- A total of 4 workgroups

Facilitated Work Group Intervention Strategies

■ Access (Function)

Running to boyfriend/girlfriend

- Meet and greet with the boy/girlfriend, get to know him, allow him to interact with family
- Set ground rules/boundaries on dating (talk about healthy relationships, dating, birth control)
- Include boyfriend in family activities
- Address youth needs, find out what activities youth wants to do
- Discuss with foster parents or group home- talk about normalcy
- Add healthy relationships & outings, dances, mall, work etc...

Intervention Strategies

Access (Function)

Running to family:

- Possible placement closer to family/old school
- Arrange for consistent sibling visitation a least twice per month
- Possible placement for siblings to be placed together
- Cell phone-contact family, friends, brothers
- Remove child from shelter/group home (maybe traditional home)
- Find other family members, neighbors, church members who may want to care for the child

Intervention Strategies

Escape (Function)

Running from Rules/Policies

- Normal rule reduction so that youth can learn to function as an adult (e.g., driver's license, dating)
- Case manager/ school work together for positive behavior support (allowing sports)
- Maintain school connections & added vocational
- Teach ways to manage group home stress:
 - Referral for anger management; ways to handle stress
 - Social skills groups
 - Big Brother/Big Sister- mentor
 - Find out/discuss child's interests

Intervention Strategies

Escape (Function)

Running from problems with the systems (bad grades in school, interrelationships school and child welfare)

- Set up meeting of all interested parties (school, family and child welfare) with youth being central to the team and set up plan
 - no promises, do not set expectations you cannot meet
- Provide tutoring and other academic supports
- Provide mentoring
- Mental health supports if needed

Runaway Scenario

- Shameika is a 15-year-old African American girl who has been in the foster care system for 8 years. She's had 12 different placements and has run away 16 times. She currently lives in a shelter group facility in a county away from her biological family. Her parents' rights have been terminated, and her two brothers live in another group home closer to where all her family live. She gets into fights with girls at the shelter home and does not like being in a shelter. Typically, when she runs away she goes to see her brothers, her parents, and friends from her old school, whom she misses. She had been doing well at her old school. Currently she is not attending school regularly, has dropped a grade level, and is failing most of her classes. Her guidance counselor has talked with her on several occasions about trying to improve her grades. Even though the courts allow the siblings to visit each other, it has been difficult for her caseworkers to take her to see them because of the distance.

Functions of Run (Shameika)

- Access to family (brothers & parents)
- Access to friends and old community
- Escape from shelter home

Interventions Specific to Function (Shameika)

- Determine how best to schedule regular visits with brothers & friends
 - Possibly move closer to home community
 - Find out about other potential family members/mentors/advocate
- Find out the type of placement she would prefer and is feasible (relative foster care, type of foster parents)
 - If she needs to stay in a group placement until a preferred placement is found determine skills that might be helpful for her at the group placement
 - Conflict resolution
 - Leadership development
 - Contingency contracts
 - Staff training

Other Interventions (Shameika)

- Find out and build on strengths and interests
- Involvement in school activities/clubs to improve school situation and develop new friendships
- Tutoring/Academic assistance perhaps with a mentor to improve grades

Questions?



Thank You!

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Kimberly Crosland, Ph.D.- Principal Investigator

crosland@usf.edu

813-974-5023

Ruby Joseph—Project Coordinator

raj@usf.edu

813-974-9339