Advancing the Self-Sufficiency and Wellbeing of At-Risk Youth: A Conceptual Framework

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Purpose and Motivation

- ACF-initiated effort to develop a research-based conceptual framework for programs to help at-risk youth move toward self-sufficiency and healthy functioning as adults

- Through multiple programs, ACF serves many at-risk youth
  - Foster youth aging out of care
  - Homeless or runaway youth
  - Teen parents

- Framework designed to guide implementation and evaluation of youth programs
Programs for Youth Transitioning to Adulthood

- Path to self-sufficiency is challenging for many disadvantaged youth

- Programs take a wide range of approaches
  - Education; Mentoring; Life Skills; Mental Health; Pregnancy Prevention, Employment

- Programs not always grounded in research, theory or evidence about what works

- Federal interest in learning which programs are effective
Integrating Policy, Theory, Practice, Evidence

- Federal Agency Input
- Synthesis of Theory and Research
- Consultations with Experts
- Draft Framework
- Youth-Serving Organizations
- Final Framework
Guiding Theoretical Perspectives

- **Risk and Resilience**
  - Build resilience by reducing risk and promoting protective factors
  - Factors exist at level of individual, family, community

- **Capital Development**
  - Human capital
  - Social capital
  - Cultural
  - Economic capital
# Integration of Evidence-Informed Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resilience</th>
<th>Capital</th>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Connect to caring adult</td>
<td>▪ Promote educational achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Address mental, emotional health</td>
<td>▪ Career exploration</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Strengthen family</td>
<td>▪ Connect to workforce</td>
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<td>▪ Develop life skills</td>
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Tailored Service Delivery Approach

- One size fits all unlikely to work
  - Some first need basic services, safety net help
  - Some need more resilience building than capital development and vice versa

- Identify which services are most needed for each youth
  - Assessment and reassessment
  - Youth’s needs change over time as they develop

- Assessment can be difficult for some youth
  - Programs must develop trusting relationship with youth; incorporate youth voice in planning services
Engagement & Stabilization

Meet Basic Needs

Connect to Safety Net

Initial and Ongoing Service Planning

Incorporate Youth Voice

Conduct Assessment Process

Evidence-Informed Interventions to Increase Resilience*

Connect to Caring Adults

Address Mental, Emotional, Behavioral Issues

Strengthen Family

Develop Life Skills

Evidence-Informed Interventions to Develop Human Capital*

Promote Educational Attainment

Provide Career Exploration

Connect Youth to Job Training and Employment

Short-Term Outcomes

Immediate

Safety & Security

Progress Toward Milestones

Intermediate

Improved Socio-Emotional Well-Being

High School Completion

Post-Secondary Education

Improved Job Skills

Long-Term Outcomes

Healthy Functioning

Resilience

Self-Efficacy

Positive, Stable Relationships

Self-Sufficiency

Stable, Adequate Earnings

Reduced Public Assistance

Underlying Risk & Protective Factors

Individual

Family

Community

* Interventions are selected based on each youth’s assessment results.
How Can Practitioners, Researchers and Policymakers Use Framework?

- Inform programming decisions
  - What to keep
  - What to add, or whether to partner with others
  - What to track, monitor

- Inform development and selection of programs in grant solicitations

- Inform design of program evaluations
Please see project products:

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