

THE ENHANCED YOUTH TRANSITION PLANNING (E-YTP) MODEL

A PROMISING APPROACH FOR SUPPORTING TRANSITION AGE YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

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JUNE 2021

This brief is part of a series on the E-YTP model, and includes specific information about the model. The additional two briefs report initial impacts of the E-YTP model on child welfare workforce and youth served. Data come from Maryland's federal Children's Bureau-funded Youth At-Risk of Homelessness Implementation Grant, known as Thrive@25.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

THRIVE@25 IS A FEDERALLY FUNDED PROGRAM¹ IN MARYLAND DESIGNED TO DEVELOP, IMPLEMENT, AND TEST A MODEL TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS AMONG YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH FOSTER CARE HISTORIES IN MARYLAND'S RURAL MID-SHORE.

Homelessness is a potential concerning outcome for this population. Youth and young adults with foster care histories are vulnerable to experiencing homelessness within three months after leaving the child welfare system.² They are also at-risk for several other poor outcomes including low rates of post-secondary degree attainment and low rates of employment.³ Youth and young adults who are currently or have been formerly involved with Maryland's child welfare system have reported to Thrive@25 researchers that they did not want more adults or new interventions in their lives. Instead, they wanted the adults who are already in their lives to have access to better information and resources. These youth wanted the adults that they are working with to both see them as individuals and be able to support them to obtain services and resources that address their specific needs and that build upon their strengths, interests, and vision for themselves.⁴ These findings led to the development of Thrive@25's model: Enhanced Youth Transition Planning (E-YTP).

WHAT IS ENHANCED-YOUTH TRANSITION PLANNING (E-YTP)?

E-YTP is an individualized, youth-driven, strengths-based, comprehensive, and team-based transition planning process that places youth, ages 14-21, who are in foster care, at the helm of their transition planning. E-YTP provides a structured system for a youth-driven transition planning process that:

- Is centered around the youth's voice, focusing on the youth's strengths and goals for themselves;
- Is grounded in a strong partnership between a youth and their foster care worker;
- Brings together a team of supportive adults, identified by youth, who will help the youth through their transition out of foster care and into adulthood;
- Includes development and maintenance of a comprehensive and collaborative Youth Transition Plan (YTP) that is meaningful and relevant to the youth and that exceeds State of Maryland and federal transition planning requirements; and
- Provides youth with opportunities to develop and practice the skills needed in adulthood (self-advocacy, effective communication, task management and follow through), through more frequent, intentional, and youth-driven meetings.

ESSENTIAL E-YTP COMPONENTS

Youth engagement

Youth-driven process

Team-based support and planning

More frequent check-ins between youth and foster care worker

Transition planning meetings at least every 3 months

Through E-YTP, youth are supported in working on their priorities, building on their strengths, and creating a team of supportive adults that they choose.

E-YTP is designed for use within public child welfare agencies, especially those within a rural setting with a smaller, generalized child welfare workforce. E-YTP is grounded in research, best practice, and implementation science,⁵ and is aligned with the values and principles that are driving systems redesign efforts in public child and family-serving systems today.

The focus of E-YTP is on building capacity within the child welfare workforce to support a youth-driven transition planning process that engages youth, is grounded in relationship building, provides youth with meaningful opportunities to develop and practice the skills needed to succeed, and creates a comprehensive and collaborative transition plan that works for the youth.

[E-YTP] gives youth a voice that they often feel they don't have while growing up in the child welfare system.

FOSTER CARE WORKER

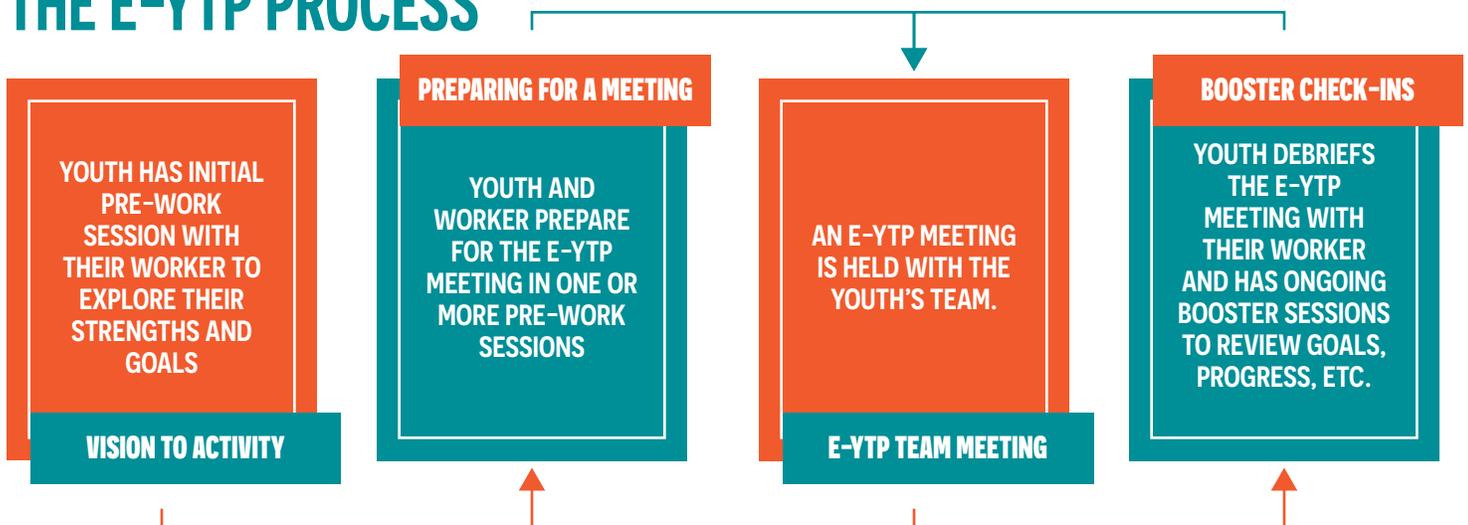
I feel listened to.

YOUTH

HOW DOES E-YTP WORK?

E-YTP uses a youth engagement framework⁶ specifically designed to support child welfare workforce to engage and support youth in having increased ownership over the team-based transition planning process. This framework provides child welfare workforce with youth engagement skills, techniques, and youth-friendly resources used throughout the E-YTP process.

THE E-YTP PROCESS



In E-YTP, workers guide youth through a process in which the youth become the driver of their transition planning. Through this process, foster care workers frequently and consistently engage and partner with youth to help them explore their goals, identify, and collaborate with their team of supportive adults, develop a plan to reach their goals, prepare for their E-YTP meetings, and monitor progress towards reaching their goals.

This process helps youth develop and practice self-determination and life skills that can continue to help them achieve success after exiting foster care.

It's just easy to understand. It helped me. I was able to work on my goals.

YOUTH



[E-YTP] allows me the freedom to really partner with the youth instead of just business as usual.

FOSTER CARE WORKER

Throughout the E-YTP process, foster care workers are responsible for:

- **Engagement** - listening to youth and getting to know them; understanding their perspective; motivating, empowering, affirming, and proactively supporting youth
- **Preparation** - empowering and supporting youth to take the lead; encouraging and guiding team members to support youth in the ways youth want; adapting approaches based on youth's needs; understanding team members' perspectives and roles
- **Collaborative Planning** - guiding youth and team members in brainstorming, collaborating, planning, implementing, and monitoring progress together while prioritizing the youth's perspective
- **Transitions** - assessing and modifying transition planning in collaboration with youth and team members to ensure tools, plans, and strategies are developed for youth to access supports after exiting care

The entire E-YTP process supports relationship building and partnership between the foster care worker and the youth. E-YTP tools, including a more comprehensive YTP, are designed to be a resource to help the foster care worker build an authentic partnership with the youth and to draw the team together around the youth's identified goals.

E-YTP also enhances existing transition planning meetings (referred to as E-YTP meetings). E-YTP meetings occur at least every three months, or more frequently depending on the individualized needs of the youth, rather than on the state-mandated schedule of every six to 12 months.⁷ Youth, in partnership with their worker, determine the E-YTP meeting agendas, location, and participant list.

WHAT DOES E-YTP ACHIEVE?

The E-YTP model seeks to achieve several direct outcomes, including, an increase in foster care worker and youth partnership, youth voice and choice consistently informs the transition planning process and E-YTP meetings, formation of a transition planning team that is youth-driven and includes individuals who will support the youth after they exit foster care (e.g., relatives, coaches, etc.), development of an individualized, comprehensive, youth-driven, and strengths-based YTP, an increase in youth, foster care worker, and team member engagement in and satisfaction with the transition planning process, and youth develop and practice of self-determination and life skills throughout the transition planning process.

This results in several immediate, positive outcomes for youth benefiting from E-YTP on the Mid-Shore. Youth are having normative experiences that promote interdependence, resiliency, self-determination, and self-efficacy, they are identifying and sharing their hopes, dreams, goals, and strengths with their foster care worker and support team, and youth are more engaged and motivated to drive their transition planning, including participating in their E-YTP meetings, and developing and follow through on transition plan tasks.⁸

HOW E-YTP IS DIFFERENT

- Language and documentation is strengths-based and in the youth's language;
- Focus shifts to goals that the youth identifies;
- Team composition changes to include more natural supports;
- Increased meeting frequency;
- Shorter meetings (because of effective pre-work); and
- Youth set the meeting agenda, location, and structure.

A cascading effect happens when workers support youth in setting their own goals and choosing their team. The trust and rapport between worker and youth is deepened and gives youth the confidence to increase their positive connections and deepen relationships with other members of their team. Youth make more meaningful progress on their transition planning goals when they choose the goals they want to work on, and as a result request to have additional meetings because they see the direct benefits of the work that is being done as a part of E-YTP.

These, in turn, are expected to lead to long-term positive outcomes for youth across the life domains of housing, education, employment, permanent connections, and social-emotional well-being. With the skills and supports provided through the E-YTP process, youth will have the ability to not only maintain but continue to make progress towards their goals after leaving foster care.

CONCLUSION

E-YTP has reinvented transition planning for transition age youth exiting foster care on Maryland's Mid-Shore. Through E-YTP, foster care workers have the skills⁹ and tools needed to engage youth and drive a transition planning process that is individualized, strengths-based, and comprehensive; gives youth the opportunity to develop and practice important life skills; and is supported by a strong team, chosen by the youth. A youth-driven transition planning process is necessary to ensure that youth exit foster care with the skills, supports, and resources they need to make a successful transition into adulthood.

[E-YTP] keeps everyone accountable... we have one or two [youth] who will remind you of their goals from the previous meetings... they're taking control of their own lives.

FOSTER CARE SUPERVISOR

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors extend their gratitude to Maryland's Mid-Shore local departments of social services, child welfare staff, and leadership for their support for this study as well as for their excellent work. The authors also thank the youth and young adults who participated in the development and implementation of E-YTP.

Suggested Citation: Gould-Kabler, C., Miller, A., Greeno, E., Harburger, D. S., Bowman, S., Hoey, E., & Strubler, K. (2021). The Enhanced Youth Transition Planning (E-YTP) Model: A promising approach for supporting transition age youth in foster care. The Institute for Innovation & Implementation, University of Maryland, Baltimore. <https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu>.

This brief was prepared by The Institute for Innovation and Implementation at the University of Baltimore with funding from Mathematica, Inc. under contract to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation under Contract Number HHSP2332015000351/75P00119F37041. The Mathematica project director is M. C. Bradley.

In September 2013, the Children’s Bureau (CB), within the Administration for Children and Families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), funded 18 grantees to develop a plan to reduce homelessness among older youth with child welfare involvement. These projects conducted data analysis to determine which youth were the most at-risk of homelessness, reviewed the service array to identify gaps in services and supports, and developed comprehensive service models to better meet the identified needs. This work, known as Youth At-Risk of Homelessness Phase I (YARH-1), served as the foundation for a second phase in which six grantees refined and tested their comprehensive service models and developed intervention manuals to support the continued implementation and possible replication or expansion of their models. In September 2015, CB invited the 18 YARH-1 grantees to compete for a second phase of funding to refine and implement the models they developed during the planning process. CB awarded six grantees for the second phase of YARH (YARH-2). YARH-2 grantees refined their comprehensive service models and conducted usability tests and a formative evaluation to determine whether they could implement their model as intended and whether progress toward desired outcomes was achieved. YARH-2 grantees also developed intervention manuals to support the continued implementation and possible replication or expansion of their service models.

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