



*Preventing Homelessness Through  
Strengthening Family Connections  
May 1, 2019*

*Maryland Symposium on Youth Homelessness*

WHILE YOU WAIT FOR US TO  
START...

Feel free to take a fun internet

Quiz! <https://www.buzzfeed.com/andyneuschwander/whats-your-adult-score>



# Intro and Outline

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- ▶ Disconnection and youth homelessness- setting the framework
- ▶ BRIEF intro to Sasha Bruce Family Strengthening Program
- ▶ Discussion and reflection- Independence vs. Connection



# Youth Homelessness and Disconnection

- ▶ “Youth experiencing homelessness or unstable housing have often lost more than just their homes.” (District of Columbia Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2017, p 20)
  - According to homeless youth census of 2016, 37% of youth experiencing homelessness stated that homelessness was a result of conflict with their family and friends. (District of Columbia Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2017, p 16)
  - Developing a community of support is a crucial part of development for all transition age youth. For those who are experiencing conflict or instability within their support systems, we can provide support with identifying, rebuilding, or maintaining significant connections.
  - The many benefits of a support network- financial, housing, child care, emotional support, advice, connections, and many others



# One youth's story

- ▶ Jonathan, 17 years old, senior in high school- wants to leave parents home, working 2 jobs but having trouble finishing school "I'm strong enough to do this on my own. I don't want any help from anyone. I'll be proud to prove to everyone I can do it by myself"
  - Dropped out of school and moved into a basement rental. After about 3 months, reached out to family about moving back in- "I can keep doing this forever but what is the point? I want something better for myself"
- ▶ Reframing connection as strength, rather than weakness



# Another youth's story

- ▶ Amara, 22 years old, in foster care from 8 yrs old-18 yrs old, now living with mom- "My life is my business. I'm just living here because I have nowhere else to go, and as soon as I can get out of here, I will"
  - ▶ Frequent family conflict, including police intervention in response to aggressive and destructive incidents
  - ▶ Long list of mental health diagnoses, hesitant to engage in mental health treatment "I can cope if I focus on my strengths, and my family stops traumatizing me"
- ▶ Improving relationships in the present rather than predicting or blaming based on past.

# Sasha Bruce Family Strengthening Program

## ▶ FSP (October 2017)

- Providing family support to minors in DC who have been on missing persons list

- Established through DC Mayor Bowser's Missing Persons Initiatives, funded by DC DHS- return home not an adequate outcome measure

- 42 families served, 33 youth discharged to more stable functioning (78%), 9 referred to continuing services, 13 currently in services

## ▶ Strengthening Foundations (May 2018)

- Providing family support to youth up to the age of 24 who are at risk of housing instability due to family conflict or lack of support

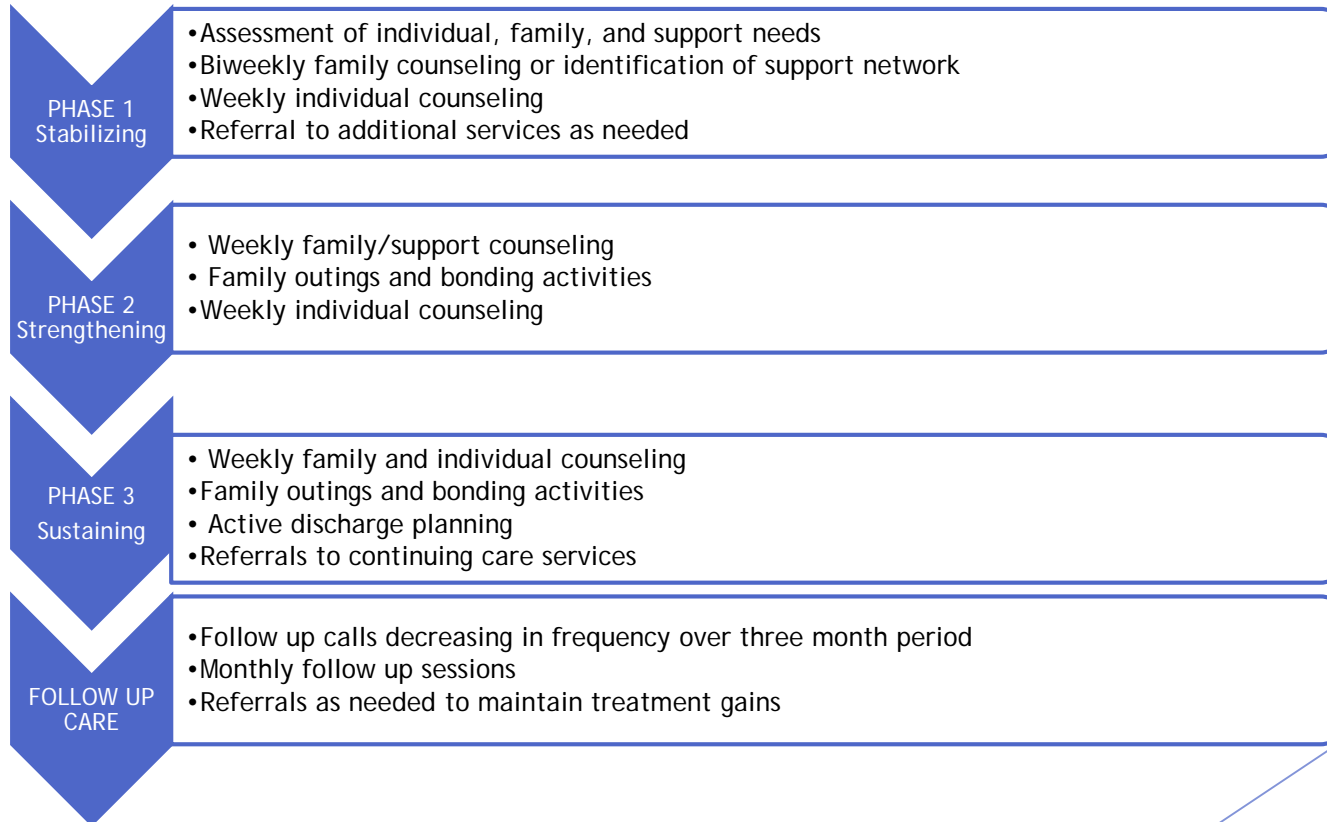
- Established through Comprehensive Plan to End Youth Homelessness, funded by DC DHS

- 16 youth completed program, 15 currently in services

- Of 16 discharged youth, 9 stabilized within home, 1 entered housing system, 6 discharged due to lack of contact

# Sasha Bruce Family Strengthening Program

- Serving youth and families up through age 24
- Home and community based family counseling to support family reunification
- Case management and referrals supporting family stability
- 3 months intensive clinical support with 3 months follow up care



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On your free time, there are many quizzes you can take on the internet...

- In case you're wondering, my score is 69% adult

# When do children become adults?

- ▶ Parent perspective
  - She's trying to be grown
  - You can make the decisions when you pay the bills
  - At 18, you're on your own
- ▶ Child perspective
  - At 18, I'm out of here.
  - I don't need anybody telling me what to do
  - I'm tired of trusting people when they let me down, I'd rather do this by myself
- ▶ Personal perspective
  - When were you grown?
  - Who were your supports?
  - When did you make responsible decisions?
  - Who could you go to for help?

You're 22 and you live at home with your parents?

Whose parents am I supposed to live with



Discuss with your neighbor



# Reframing treatment goals: “independence” vs “connection”

Independence-  
not requiring  
or relying on  
others (as for  
care or  
livelihood)

**Key Differences Between Individualist and Collectivist Societies**

Individualist	Collectivist
Everyone grows up to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family only.	People are born into extended families or in other groups that continue protecting them in exchange for loyalty.
Children learn to think in terms of “I”.	Children learn to think in terms of “we”.
Individual ownership of resources.	Resources should be shared with relatives.
Low-context communication prevails.	High context communication prevails.
Media is the primary source of information.	Social networks are the primary source of information.
Self-actualization by every individual is a ultimate goal.	Harmony and consensus in society are ultimate goal.
Occupation mobility is higher.	Occupation mobility is lower.
Task prevails over relationship.	Relationship prevails over task.
Individual interests prevail over collective.	Collective interest prevail over individual.
Per capita GDP tends to be higher.	Per capital GDP tends to be lower.



# Emphasizing Connection

- ▶ Neurological research shows that the human brain is wired for connection (Banks, 2015)
  - Smart Vagus- regulates emotions, is healthier and well toned when in healthy relationships (hand model D Seigel 2012)
  - Dorsal Anterior Cingulate Cortex- provides the same response to physical pain and social exclusion
  - Dopamine reward pathways- Increased dopamine and positive feelings in response to connection with others, rewards activities that promotes survival
  - Mirroring response- crying at movies/hearing someone else's story, cringing at dental pain etc- provides ability to understand others experience and connect
- ▶ Banks, A. (2015) *Wired to Connect*. New York, NY: Jeremy Tarcher/Penguin.
- ▶ Summary version, Marlatt-Murdoch

<https://wholeperson.com/blog/combining-neuroscience-relational-cultural-theory-clinical-practice>



# Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors(ISSB)

Barrera, M.J. & Ainlay, S. L. (1983). The structure of social support: A conceptual and empirical analysis. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 11, 133-143

During the past four weeks, how often did other people do these activities for you, to you, or with you:

1. Looked after a family member when you were away.
2. Was right there with you (physically) in a stressful situation.
3. Provided you with a place where you could get away for awhile.
4. Watched after your possessions when you were away (pets, plants, home, apartment, etc.).
5. Told you what she/he did in a situation that was similar to yours.
6. Did some activity with you to help you get your mind off of things.
7. Talked with you about some interests of yours.
8. Let you know that you did something well.
9. Went with you to someone who could take action.
10. Told you that you are OK just the way you are.
11. Told you that she/he would keep the things that you talk about private - just between the two of you
12. Assisted you in setting a goal for yourself.
13. Made it clear what was expected of you.
14. Expressed esteem or respect for a competency or personal quality of yours.
15. Gave you some information on how to do something
16. Suggested some action that you should take.
17. Gave you over \$25.
18. Comforted you by showing you some physical affection.
19. Gave you some information to help you understand a situation you were in.
20. Provided you with some transportation.
21. Checked back with you to see if you followed the advice you were given.
22. Gave you under \$25.
23. Helped you understand why you didn't do something well.
24. Listened to you talk about your private feelings.
25. Loaned or gave you something (a physical object other than money) that you needed.
26. Agreed that what you wanted to do was right.
27. Said things that made your situation clearer and easier to understand.
28. Told you how he/she felt in a situation that was similar to your.
29. Let you know that he/she will always be around if you need assistance.
30. Expressed interest and concern in your well-being.
31. Told you that she/he feels very close to you.

# Responding to disconnection

- ▶ Responses to disconnection (youth side)-
  - ▶ I have no mother
  - ▶ I'm not crazy
  - ▶ I want to do it on my own
  - ▶ I want to prove I'm strong enough
  - ▶ Why keep putting yourself out there to get hurt when you can just cut people out of your life?
  - ▶ I'm just going to do me.
- ▶ Responses to disconnection (parent side)
  - ▶ He wants to be grown, then let him be grown
  - ▶ She's going to do what she wants to do
  - ▶ At 18, she is on her own.
  - ▶ Let him face the consequences. He'll learn.



# Using a Family Counseling Approach

- ▶ Identifying support network (biological family OR CHOSEN SUPPORTS)
- ▶ Strengthening connections and support to build resources, emotional support, physical support, advice, and more
- ▶ Early identification and intervention with youth who may be likely to leave or be put out of home with no resources
- ▶ Competency based process oriented model
- ▶ Emphasizing opportunities for connection, including desired activities



# Supporting Connection for LGBTQ Youth

Morton, M. H., Samuels, G. M., Dworsky, A., & Patel, S. (2018). *Missed opportunities: LGBTQ youth homelessness in America*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

- ▶ LGBTQ youth are disproportionately represented in youth experiencing homelessness
  - ▶ 2 times greater risk of homelessness
  - ▶ Of youth experiencing homelessness, 2 times greater risk of death
- ▶ Coming out is not the only factor in youth homelessness
  - ▶ “Most LGBTQ youth became homeless not in the immediate aftermath of “coming out” but in large part as the result of family instability and frayed relationships over time” (*Key findings overview*)
  - ▶ Sexual orientation or gender identity are usually only one factor among many family stressors (poverty, loss, mental health, violence, financial instability, etc)
- ▶ Families can be sources of support and stress at the same time
  - ▶ Often youth have an ally or support within the family even when others in family are rejecting
- ▶ Positive connections outside of the family can be especially important for LGBTQ youth
  - ▶ Building relationships with LGBTQ community, friends, service providers, and others can support and affirm youth

# System Involved Youth

- ▶ According to the Voices of Youth Count (Morton, Dworsky, and Samuels, 2017), system involved youth are disproportionately represented among youth experiencing homelessness
  - ▶ 1/3 of youth surveyed had some experience with foster care
  - ▶ Nearly ½ of youth surveyed had been in detention, jail, or prison
- ▶ System involved youth are in need of additional services to strengthen support networks for those youth and families under increased pressures.

# Institutionalized Inequality

- ▶ According to Voices of Youth Count data (Morton, Dworsky, and Samuels, 2017) youth reporting annual household income of less than 24,000 dollars were at 162% increased risk of experiencing homelessness
- ▶ Systemic inequalities contribute to increased vulnerability for people of color and marginalized groups- placing accountability on individuals or families for success ignores **SOCIAL CONTEXT**
- ▶ Individuals, families, and communities can be successful and support each other
- ▶ Families may be willing to support youth and not have financial resources
  - ▶ Project Empowerment being established to provide financial support to families for specific expenses that if provided may prevent youth from becoming homeless
  - ▶ Families can be a strong source of support even in absence of financial resources.



# Collaboration across agencies

- ▶ Creating a strong support network and a strong community
- ▶ Identifying youth in need of prevention, stabilization, or reunification support- Special populations- foster care, juvenile justice, LGBTQ youth, youth experiencing loss of parent
- ▶ Community goals for working together and identifying youth and family needs- What are the access points in your community for youth at risk of homelessness? What early interventions can be put in place?

# Evaluating Your Program

- ▶ Are there opportunities to involve community ?
- ▶ Are there events for family and/or friends?
- ▶ Do treatment goals include any work on relationships or connections?
- ▶ Do you evaluate and support youth in relationship building skills and patterns?
- ▶ Is there flexibility and support for youth to be involved in healthy relationships and/or start their own family?
- ▶ Do you collaborate with other agencies to identify additional resources and supports for your clients?
- ▶ Do you have opportunities for clients to be sources of support to others?

# Questions?



- ▶ Contact info

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# References

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