

APPENDIX A

YDD Discussion Guide

Updated April 2012

INTRODUCTION

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this discussion. Your participation is very important to the study. I'm _____ and I work for Mathematica Policy Research/Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, an independent social policy research center.

We are conducting a study for the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Research at the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The major goal of the study is to develop a research-based conceptual framework that could be applied to existing or new ACF programs for at-risk youth. The framework focuses on improving the workforce career trajectories of youth to increase their ability to become self-sufficient and avoid public assistance (e.g., through education and work opportunities), and to promote their well-being and adult outcomes. When complete, the framework will inform ACF decisions about possible demonstrations and evaluations of innovative approaches to improving youth outcomes. The target population for this project is youth at risk of not becoming self-sufficient as they transition to adulthood.

We have drafted the framework and would like to talk with you about your experiences serving at-risk youth, to examine whether implementation of programs based on the framework is feasible and makes sense from your perspective. Our team will use your responses to refine the draft framework. Comments will not be attributed to specific individuals or programs, and no individuals will be quoted by name. Your participation in this discussion is voluntary.

[Skip if individual interview] I am going to moderate the discussion. It is really important for everyone to speak up so we can have a lively and informative discussion. It will also be helpful if you speak one at a time, so everyone has a chance to talk. We ask that you respect each other's point of view.

There are no right or wrong answers. You are the experts—we want to learn from you.

We ask that you not share the draft conceptual framework as it is still a work in progress. We will not share your comments with anyone other than members of the research team. We will not attribute any statements to you, or your organization, in the final report. We will send you the final report, which will include the final conceptual framework.

We have many topics to cover during the discussion. At times, I may need to move the conversation along to be sure we cover everything.

I would like to tape-record our discussion so I can listen to it later when I write up my notes. No one besides our research team will listen to the tape. If you want to say anything that you don't want taped, please let me know and I will be glad to pause the tape recorder. Do you/ Does anybody have any objections to being part of this interview or to my taping our discussion?

As a reminder, we want to reiterate that being part of this discussion is up to you, and you can choose not to answer a question if you wish. Being part of this discussion will not affect your employment.

The discussion will last about one hour, and we will not take any formal breaks. But please feel free to get up at any time if you need to.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to meet with us today. Are there any questions before we get started?

PRESENTATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

This figure displays the core elements of the conceptual framework in the order they are likely to occur [provide handout]. In other words, youth enter programs with a set of risk and protective factors that reflect their background and experiences; their needs and circumstances are assessed; and they are matched with interventions to increase resilience and human capital. The expected outcome is that the young person will transition to adulthood better equipped to become self-sufficient.

In many cases, youth will need to achieve physical safety and security and increase their resiliency before they can focus on building human capital. However, progress toward self-sufficiency might not always follow this trajectory. For example, some youth may be able to increase resiliency while developing human capital, or even begin to build human capital prior to increasing resiliency (as represented by the dotted line around the two types of evidence-informed intervention in the middle three columns). In some cases, the assessment might indicate that youth are already prepared for interventions to increase human capital and that interventions to increase resiliency are unnecessary.

Because youth are continually developing and encountering new challenges and circumstances, follow-up assessments would be planned during and after they complete each intervention. This is indicated by the arrow that loops back from the interventions to the assessment. In this way, the amelioration of prior needs could be assessed, and additional needs identified as youth progress toward adulthood.

In this framework, program duration would vary based on individual needs and the age at which youth enter the program. Some youth might require only a short-term intervention, such as one that provides them with work experiences. Alternatively, other youth might require a multi-year intervention that begins by addressing their basic needs and helping them cope with the effects of trauma before providing them with the educational and career training that will set them on a path towards self-sufficiency.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What elements of the proposed conceptual framework has your program implemented, how were they implemented, and with what effect?
 - Needs assessment
 - Addressing the effects of trauma, when present
 - Strategies for building resilience
 - Preparation for adult self-sufficiency
2. What key lessons has your program learned with respect to identifying, engaging, and addressing the needs of youth at high risk?
3. In your opinion, what is the likelihood that at-risk youth would enroll and engage in a program that follows this framework?

4. Based on your knowledge and experience as a practitioner working with youth, what is the feasibility of implementing the proposed conceptual framework?
 - What supports or resources would be needed to incorporate a stronger focus on resilience building or human capital?
 - What changes in funding restrictions, reporting requirements, policies, or program procedures would be needed?
 - Would changes need to take place at the local, state, and/or federal level?
 - What, if any, changes would be needed in organizational structure, staffing, or training?
 - Would new organizational or agency partnerships need to be developed? Which organizations or agencies?
5. If resources were available to implement programs based on the framework, to what extent do you think they could enhance or strengthen currently available services? To what extent could they detract from existing services?
 - Are there youth populations for whom the framework is likely to be more or less useful (e.g., age groups, number of risks, severity of risk)?
 - What agencies or types of organizations are likely to be most suited to implementing programs based on this framework?