Introduction

Thank you for joining us today. We would like to invite you to participate in a focus group that will last about 90 minutes. We are conducting an evaluation of LifeSet, and today we'd like to learn more about how the LifeSet program operates. Specifically, we will talk about youth engagement, things that support or hinder the program's success, and how you interact with other agencies among other topics. We will use this information to better understand how the LifeSet program operates and serves young adults in New Jersey.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any question or not participate in the interview at all. There will be no consequences to you if you choose not to participate. We will keep the information you provide private and will not share it with anyone except for research staff working on the study. Additionally, federal law states that an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB number for this data collection is 0970-0577 and the expiration date is XX/XX/XXXX.

Background and Role

Welcome everyone. Let's go around the room and briefly introduce ourselves. I'll start [facilitator introduces self]. Please share the following:

1. Your name
2. How long you have been a LifeSet Specialist?
3. What is the size of your caseload?

Thank you for sharing. This is the second focus group we've held with LifeSet Specialists in New Jersey. During our first focus group in June 2022, we learned about the LifeSet program model and how services are delivered. Today we'd like to discuss other areas of the program's operation and interactions with youth.

Service Delivery

Youth engagement

To begin, I would like to understand how and how much youth are engaged in LifeSet. I use the term "engagement" broadly to include service uptake, youth's involvement or participation in LifeSet activities, and contact between Specialists and youth. It also includes things you do to encourage youth to engage with LifeSet.

4. How do you develop, grow, and maintain a youth's trust and engagement in LifeSet?
5. How would you describe the typical youth's level of engagement with LifeSet services? What level of youth engagement is expected?
   a. What techniques do you use with youth who are reluctant or say they don't need LifeSet?
6. How does youth engagement change over the course of services (from initial referral through case closure)?
   a. How do the strategies used to engage youth changes over the course of services?
   b. As a LifeSet Specialist, how do you help remove barriers to youths' engagement?

Cultural responsiveness

7. Do you consider the LifeSet program to be culturally responsive? [If needed] In other words, is the program able to take into account youths' unique demographic backgrounds and experiences (such as, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, citizenship status)?

    a. If so, in what ways? Could you give some examples?

    b. In what ways are LifeSet services not responsive to youths' demographic and cultural backgrounds?

Difference between LifeSet and SAU

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about how LifeSet services compare to the other programs and services that youth preparing to leave foster care may receive.

8. In what ways is LifeSet similar or different from other services usually provided to youth leaving foster care?

    a. [Probes if needed] Types of services offered, intensity or duration, program philosophy or values

9. Are some youth a better fit than others for LifeSet? If so, what makes youth a good fit for LifeSet?

Data Systems and Use

Next, I'd like to learn about the data systems and reports you use for LifeSet.

10. About how much time during a typical week do you spend entering information into one or more data systems? [Probe on differences for those using multiple versus single systems]

    a. Does this time impact your ability to provide services to youth? Why do you say that? Could someone give an example?

11. How are data or reports used to support decision making or program improvements?

    a. [Probe] Are the data used to inform decisions about youth's services or needs? Could someone give an example?

Partner Relationships

I'd like to talk next about how you work with DCF and other agencies to carry out LifeSet.

Relationship among implementing agencies

12. Can someone give an example of how you coordinate with DCF caseworkers about a youth in LifeSet?

    a. [if needed] For example, around service plans, referrals, court appearances, etc.?

    b. In general, do you find coordinating with DCF caseworkers to be helpful or unhelpful in meeting youths' needs? Could someone tell me why you say that or give an example?

Relationships with other entities/systems

13. Besides DCF, do you collaborate with other agencies or organizations to support youth in LifeSet?

    a. [Alternative wording, if needed] Do you collaborate with schools or training programs, legal aid, probation, mental health, or other organizations?

    b. Who do you work with and in what ways?

Implementation Infrastructure

The next series of questions is about things that may impact, either positively or negatively, your ability to carry out LifeSet.

Impact of policies

14. What impact do DCF rules or regulations have on your ability to provide services youth need? Do they make it easier or harder?

15. What impact do Youth Villages rules or regulations have on your ability to provide services youth need? Do they make it easier or harder?

Challenges, supports, and barriers

16. What challenges have you encountered carrying out the LifeSet model? How did you overcome these challenges?

17. What things have helped support carrying out the LifeSet model?
    a. [If needed] For example, technical assistance from Youth Villages, availability of services youth needs, data systems or technology, coordination with partners, or funding.

18. We understand that a component of the LifeSet model is the use of a LifeSet team. Can someone please describe LifeSet's team structure?
    a. In what ways does LifeSet's teaming structure support or hinder your ability to carry out the model?
    b. How does this structure impact your work with youth in the program?

Reflection on LifeSet Services
Finally, I'm interested in your opinions about the LifeSet program.

19. Is there anything about LifeSet that you would like to change? If so, what is it?
20. What does the LifeSet program do well?
21. What could the LifeSet program improve upon?

Closing Questions
Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.

22. Is there anything that I did not ask about that you think I should know about LifeSet or your experience?
23. Do you have any final questions for me about the study, or about the research team?