Reducing Run Behaviors with Youth in Foster Care: Evaluating an Assessment Tool for Use with Child Welfare Personnel

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Foster Care Issues

- Over **50% of children in foster care** (and the child protection system) have **clinically significant emotional or behavioral difficulties** (EBD; Burns, 2004)

- Youth in foster care are **twice as likely to run away** than youth in the general population (Sedlak et al., 2002)

- Youth with EBD in the foster system may be experiencing **placement change rates that average 4+ per year** (Aarons et al., 2010; Clark, Lee, Prang, & McDonald, 1996)

Educational Issues of Youth in Foster Care

- Educational achievement is low: **2/3 of children in foster care perform below grade level** (Fanshel, Finch, & Grundy, 1990)

- About **30-40% receive special education services** (Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, 1999)

- **1/3 never receive a high school diploma or GED** (Courtney and Dworsky, 2005)

- Poor educational achievement, in turn, leads to poor employment outcomes – only **46% employed at a rate of 10.73 an hour** (Courtney, 2011)
Runaway Behaviors of Youth in Foster Care

- Run behavior is associated with placement disruption and elevated risk for poor life outcomes
- Highest rates of running:
  - Youth between 12-18 years old
  - Girls > Boys
  - Youth with mental health or substance abuse problems
  - Youth with histories of placement instability

Runaway Behaviors, cont.

- When youth are “running,” or missing, they are at higher risk for perpetrating crimes, contacting drugs/alcohol, or being victimized
- Many of the tragic stories occur when foster youth are on the run
- Reasons youth run are numerous
Interventions from Literature?

What are current interventions?
- Adding diagnoses
- Medications
- Talk therapy
- Contracts

We published a preliminary study on a behavior analytic approach to reducing runaway behaviors and stabilize placement (Clark, Crosland, Geller, et al., 2008).

Preliminary Study

Determined whether a function-based intervention would be effective in decreasing runaway behavior.

(Clark, Crosland, Geller, et al., 2008)
Group Study: Matched Comparison Design

- Data from state database on youth in foster care
- 13 intervention participants

Matched comparison youth:
- 3 matched comparison youth for each participant, all from same database [total of 39 matches to provide additional statistical power (Hennekens et al., 1987)]

Matching based on (1) gender, (2) age at first run; (3) ethnicity, (4) lack of extended incarceration – and availability of data

Principal dependent variable = % days on run

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![Bar chart showing days on run for BASP and Control groups.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>1 Year Post</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BASP</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
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RUN Research Project

Kim Crosland, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator

Funded Grant to Expand Research
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RUN goals research goals:
- Ensure that the Functional Assessment Interview for Runaways (FAIR) is applicable &
effective when used within the Child Welfare system by these personnel
- Manualize function-based assessment
- Provide a model for intervening with youth in foster care who run away from placements to:
  - Reduce runaway behavior
  - Stabilize placement
  - Improve school progress indicators
Current Research Study

Ability to identify run functions and function-based interventions: Comparing Behavior Analysts and Child Welfare Personnel

Jessica Moore
Purpose

- Compared behavior analysts versus front-line child welfare personnel in ability to identify functions of run away behavior of youth in foster care and subsequent interventions based on the functions

- These findings will assist in determining the extent of training required for child welfare personnel

- Assess social validity
  - Evaluate the ease of determining function and intervention using a structured assessment tool (FAIR)
Methods – Participants

- 6 Board Certified Behavior Analysts
  - Some prior experience with youth in foster care
- 6 Child Welfare Personnel
  - Child welfare personnel – individuals such as caseworkers or staff of agencies that work directly with youth who are in the foster care system who have run away.
- Behavior Analysts functioned as the “gold standard” as we would expect them to be able to adequately determine function and develop function-based interventions for runaway behaviors
- Neither BCBAs nor caseworkers had seen or used the FAIR tool before

FAIR TOOL

- Functional Assessment Interview for Runaways (FAIR)
- Interview-based tool that helps determine function of youth runaway behaviors
- After refinement, tool will be used directly by child welfare personnel to stabilize placements and increase chances for academic success
Methods - Video Review and Completion of FAIR Tool

- All participants watched the same 3 videos
- Videos were scripted role-plays between interviewer and interviewee including details as to why youth ran away
  - Interviewer = member of our research team
  - Interviewee = youth recruited to participate as actors/actresses
  - Interviewer asked youth questions from the FAIR tool

Methods – Video Review and Completion of FAIR Tool

- Participants were given a copy of the FAIR and asked to use it for note-taking purposes and to completely fill out the summary section at the end
  - In this section, participants were instructed to determine the function(s) of the run behavior and;
  - Participants were required to list a minimum of 3 possible function based interventions for runaway behaviors
Methods – Video Review and Completion of FAIR Tool

- Research team member stopped the DVD between videos in order to give participant time to fill out FAIR tool
- Process repeated for 2nd and 3rd videos and took about 90 minutes to complete

Methods – Data Collection

- Comparison of the data from the summary section of the FAIR
- Function of the run behavior and at least 3 function-based interventions
- Allowed us to evaluate the differences between functions and interventions developed by behavior analysts and child welfare personnel
**Consensus of Functions**

- For each video, 3 BCBA-Ds reached a consensus on the functions of the youth’s runaway behavior
- All videos had 2 or 3 functions
- Other information not related function but believed to be important for stabilizing and/or improving youth’s outcomes was also determined by the BCBA-Ds

**Results – FAIR Tool Functions**

- Match – if the function listed matched the consensus of the BCBA-Ds
- No Match - function listed did not match the consensus of the BCBA-Ds
- Missing – function from consensus of BCBA-Ds was not listed
**Example:** The functions of Jorge’s running away are to be able to spend time with his girlfriend and get away from the rules at the group home. Other information that came up in the interview is that he also likes to see his friends, is behind in school, and likes his former foster parents.

- **Match** → access to girlfriend
- **Not-Match** → avoid stigma of foster care
- **Missing** → no function listed

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**Results – FAIR Tool Functions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caseworkers</th>
<th>Behavior Analysts</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Match</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Not a Match</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Missing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Missing</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Caseworkers:
  - Match: 51.70% (83.30%)
  - No Match: 43.30% (14.60%)
  - Missing: 5.00% (2.10%)

- Behavior Analysts:
  - Match: 83.30% (83.30%)
  - Not a Match: 14.60% (2.10%)
  - Missing: 0% (2.10%)
Results – FAIR Tool Interventions

1. Function-Based

2. Function-Related

3. Non-Function-Based Helpful

4. Non-Function-Based Non-Helpful

Example: The functions of Jorge's running away are to be able to spend time with his girlfriend and get away from the rules at the group home. Other information that came up in the interview is that he also likes to see his friends, is behind in school, and likes his former foster parents.

1. **Function Based** → Develop a plan with the group home that outlines days/times Jorge can leave to see girlfriend as long as rules are followed

2. **Function Related** → Decrease levels of staff coercion

3. **Non-function Based Helpful** → Provide a tutor

4. **Non-Function-Based Not Helpful** → Have him attend counseling
Results – FAIR Tool Interventions

Caseworkers

- Function-Based: 10.90%
- Function-Related: 30.00%
- Non-Function-Based Helpful: 30.90%
- Non-Function-Based Non-Helpful: 38.20%

Behavior Analysts

- Function-Based: 13.80%
- Function-Related: 19.00%
- Non-Function-Based Helpful: 67.20%
- Non-Function-Based Non-Helpful: 0%

Results – Social Validity Questionnaire

Social Validity Questionnaire Results

- Assessing Function of Run
- Determining Function-Based Interventions
- Feasibility of Tool

Scores: 0, 0.5, 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, 5
**Summary**

- Results indicate FAIR was effective in determining functions of run-away behavior when used by both BCBAs and caseworkers.
- Child welfare personnel had a more difficult time determining function-based interventions.

**What are we doing now?**

- Training case managers how to use the tool with their youth who run away.
- Have developed a manual of interventions that caseworkers can use to help them use individualized strength- and function-based interventions:
  - Preference assessments
  - Contingency contracts
  - Living arrangements, training
  - School involvement, etc.
- Currently testing the tool in real world settings for efficacy purposes.
Questions and Contact Information

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