

Restorative Practices in
Dependency Court
(HOPE Court)
Cohort 1 - Research Report

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Introduction

A substantial percentage of youth who age out of the foster care system experience serious negative outcomes. Based on data from the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2020), less than 50% of these youth graduate from high school; 33% are pregnant by age 18; 47% are unemployed at age 26; 30% are diagnosed with an emotional, behavioral, or developmental condition with at least 50% suffering from post-traumatic stress symptoms; and 10% are on probation. Contributing to these unfavorable outcomes are unresolved traumatic experiences and a lack of planning, preparation, and life skill-building.

There are approximately 1,500 youth who are 18 years of age and older currently served by Broward County's Transition to Independent Living (TIL) system of care. There are 1,170 youth in foster care in Broward County (The Fostering Care Improvement Organization, 2020). Of those, approximately 5% are 17 years old and will be aging out of foster care on their 18th birthday. With over 100 youth aging out of foster care annually and historically negative consequences for TIL youth, Broward County requires an effective system to prepare these adolescents for self-sufficiency and success in adulthood.

Youth aging out of foster care can receive state benefits after their 18th birthday through state-funded programs such as Extended Foster Care (EFC) and Postsecondary Education Supports and Services (PESS). These programs provide significant financial, housing, and supportive services to assist in the transition to early adulthood for youth who otherwise would have very limited support. Nevertheless, a large percentage of youth do not take advantage of these programs. Analysis of data provided via the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) database covering youth who aged out between 2014 and 2018, indicated that between 60% to 70% of youth who were eligible for these programs did not participate, opted out before their

eligibility period ended, or were terminated and did not return to one of these programs.

Furthermore, the largest number of opt-outs and unsuccessful terminations occurred in the first two months of participation. TIL youth who are unable to maintain their state benefits frequently lose their housing or become involved with the criminal justice system.

HOPE Court is an innovative approach that was recently piloted to support youth aging out of the foster care system without intact families. HOPE Court employs restorative practices within the dependency court system in Broward County to ensure TIL youth have a voice in their dependency court process and transition plan. HOPE Court was designed to build the necessary connections, relationships, and social capital to empower youth in their individualized preparation and transition to independent living. This is accomplished through the provision and modeling of empathy, restorative practice-based court hearings that engage youth, as well as supportive circles that teach life skills, encourage positive choices, and increase healthy behaviors in a safe, conducive, and youth-led environment. Pre-court listening circles and the reframing of conflict during judiciary proceedings creates collaboration among child welfare entities. Accordingly, restorative legal processes, supportive youth circles, and TIL planning comprise the programmatic components of HOPE Court to ultimately increase youth engagement in the EFC and PESS programs after their 18th birthday. The inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes associated with the HOPE Court approach are depicted in the program logic model provided in Appendix A. HOPE Court was initially scheduled to start in March 2020; however, the start date was postponed to April 2020 due to COVID-19. Training of HOPE Court team members was conducted 3 months prior to the scheduled start date.

Restorative Practices

As indicated previously, HOPE Court is grounded in a restorative practices approach. Restorative practices are an emerging area in social science that aims to strengthen relationships between individuals and facilitate social connections within communities (International Institute for Restorative Practices, n.d.). The HOPE Court framework encompasses the following fundamentals: (1) individuals are most likely to trust and cooperate freely with systems when a fair process is observed (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003); and (2) individuals are “happiest, healthiest, and most likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in authority do things WITH them, rather than TO them or FOR them.” (Costello et al., 2010, p. 96).

The development of the contemporary restorative practices model stemmed in part from a case in which a probation officer mediated the meeting of two teenagers and the victims of a vandalism case (Wachtel, 2016). This historic event in 1974 was unusual as both the victim and offenders had a facilitated discussion to assist in resolving the impact of damage caused by the offense. After a productive session, the offenders decided to make amends and thus resulted in the peaceful restoration of damaged property. The success of this approach ultimately contributed to the first victim-offender reconciliation program in Canada (McCold, 1999; Peachey, 1989). The positive effects of this approach impacted North America and Europe throughout the later portions of the century, with organizations adding various collaborative components, including conferences and circles, to increase the efficiency and value of these practices (Umbreit, 2000). Restorative practices have been utilized in over 80 countries because of promising outcomes (Van Ness, 2005), across a diverse range of settings including high schools, criminal courts, and family courts (Acosta et al., 2019; Daicoff, 2015).

Conceptual Basis

The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) defines restorative practices as “the use of informal and formal processes that precede wrongdoing, those that proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing” (Wachtel, 2016, para. 6). The extant literature does not provide a singular definition of what constitutes restorative practices; in fact, Pavelka and Thomas (2019) broadly view it as any action or event that results in healing.

Restorative justice can be thought of as a subset of restorative practice, which is “reactive, consisting of formal or informal responses to crime and other wrongdoing after it occurs” (Wachtel, 2016, para. 6). Restorative justice is an approach to justice that primarily focuses on addressing the harm caused by a crime or an offense and described by Dandurand and Griffiths (2006) as follows:

Restorative justice refers to a process for resolving crime by focusing on redressing the harm done to the victims, holding offenders accountable for their actions and, often also, engaging the community in the resolution of that conflict. Participation of the parties is an essential part of the process that emphasizes relationship building, reconciliation and the development of agreements around a desired outcome between victims and offender. Restorative justice processes can be adapted to various cultural contexts and the needs of different communities. Through them, the victim, the offender and the community regain some control over the process. Furthermore, the process itself can often transform the relationships between the community and the justice system as a whole (p. 6).

In a similar manner, restorative practice includes repair and reconciliation that is not necessarily associated with criminal cases. It includes techniques such as restorative circles, community building circles, and peer mediation, among others (Marsh, 2017).

Braithwaite's reintegrative shaming theory is most commonly used to explain restorative justice practices (Wilson et al., 2017). He views what is referred to as reintegrative shaming as a way to get the community involved in condemning the wrongdoing of the offender. As long as the offender makes amends and repairs the harm caused, they can be reintegrated back into society. Importantly, Braithwaite notes that the shaming needs to be reintegrative rather than stigmatizing (Wilson et al., 2017).

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice describes a collaborative process in which all affected groups come together to fix the damage caused by the offender (Pavelka & Thomas, 2019). Weitekamp and Parmentier (2018) view this collaborative process as having three primary goals: victim reparation, offender responsibility, and communities of care reconciliation. Specific approaches that are frequently used include:

1. **Peace Circles-** This practice occurs when all stakeholders sit in a circle facing each other, allowing each individual a turn to discuss concerns and ways of moving forward. The goal is to repair tension and grow together (Mills et al., 2012).
2. **Family Group Conferencing-** Similar to Peace Circles, this practice allows for a facilitator to mediate a conversation between the victim, family members, or other pivotal personnel involved in the situation. However, the main difference being participants are given contractual documents to sign to ensure productive steps are taken (Umbreit, 2000).

3. **Reparative Boards-** Particularly used in youth justice, this practice involves the offender and a group of citizens working together to create an outline for reparations that can be made for the particular crime. The offender who was found guilty must provide documentation and/or evidence of working towards those agreed reparations (Wilson et al., 2017).
4. **Victim Support Circles-** Not always used by individuals that committed crimes but rather for kids who are troubled and living in unfortunate circumstances. It is advantageous for younger victims to talk to licensed professionals about the current state of their situation and how they can move forward (Bottoms et al., p. 157).
5. **Victim Impact Panels-** Using this approach, victims are given the opportunity to meet a different victim from a similar crime to bond and obtain support. The main purpose of this practice is to divert the attention from what the offender did, to create a path to move forward collaboratively (United Nations, 2016).
6. **Victim-offender Mediation-** This practice involves the direct meeting between the offender and the accused. The purpose of this practice is for questions that can be asked to either side to obtain more clarity of the situation and why it happened (Wilson et al., 2017).

Since the 1980s, First Nation people and local justice officials in the Yukon have developed partnerships between communities and formal justice agencies to build shared responsibility for handling criminal conduct through Community Peacemaking Circles (Coates et al., 2003). Proponents of circles as a means for “doing justice” contend that this approach is more effective because it draws on inherent values of traditional native ways. It does so by explicitly empowering each individual in a circle as an equal, and by clearly lifting up the

relationship between justice and the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of participants in the context of their community and culture (Coates et al., 2003).

Restorative Practices in Schools

Restorative practices, which are focused on building community and repairing harm, have also been utilized in school settings as alternative approaches to disciplinary measures such as suspension and expulsion. Restorative practices in school settings differ from the use of restorative justice in the criminal justice system in its proactive approach by the school community to facilitate leadership and build community and social capital. “Crucially, restorative practices require that all parties be present and involved in relationship building and restitution, rather than removing or providing more restrictive placements for students who may have caused harm or alienating victims from school” (Green et al., 2019, p. 169). Restorative practices approaches in school settings may include but are not limited to connection circles and restorative conversations, problem-solving circles, restorative remediation, and community group conferences. With regard to community group conferences, all members involved (e.g., accused, victim, parents, community members) work together with a trained facilitator to identify the root cause of the offense and look towards making amends to repair the harm, restore community and create trust (Green, et al., 2019). The approach is tailored depending on the unique situation; Pranis (2015) argues there is a level of healing and connection that should take place during these discussions.

In a study examining the use of restorative practices in 18 schools, all schools included in the study showed decreases in discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions (Kline, 2016). Discussions concerning responsibility and accountability were found to help students understand the severity of their actions. It was also found that the accused had “empathy with the feelings of

others affected by [their] own actions” (p.101). These findings are supportive of the reasoning behind implementing group conferences, as healing and restoration of the community were both achieved.

In a randomized controlled study of the implementation of restorative practices in the Pittsburgh school system, the use of restorative conferences and responsive circles resulted in a reduction in suspension rates and an improvement in the overall school climate (Augustine et al., 2018). Furthermore, a systematic review of 10 studies of restorative justice practices in U.S. schools found that, in a majority of the schools, social relationships improved, and discipline referrals were reduced (Katic, 2020). However, there was ambiguity in the operational definitions of restorative justice across the study schools.

Restorative Justice in the Child Welfare System

Similar to the use of restorative justice in school systems, other areas have benefited from its implementation, including the child welfare system (Walker, 2012). The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2020) defines the child welfare system as a group of services that aim to improve the well-being of children who have been neglected or abused. These services include investigating reports of potential child abuse, providing support to families and safe shelter to youth. In the restorative justice literature, the use of terms such as “offender” and “victim” are common practices; however, in the context of the child welfare system, a different approach is necessary as family issues often arise due to child abuse or neglect. Restorative practices are seen as ways to strengthen child and family rights (Pennell et al., 2011).

Walker (2012) provided a case example illustrating the impact that restorative justice can have in prioritizing the health of a family. The case highlights a female youth with a history of drug addiction and a troublesome relationship with her single mother. The youth was placed in

the foster system and was alternating between living with her mother and foster parents. After a physical altercation between the youth and her mother, the youth left for her foster parent's house. At this point, the mother got both upset and worried and called the police. After speaking with the daughter, the police contacted a youth justice coordinator. This individual was introduced to mediate a peaceful conference between all stakeholders. The youth justice coordinator encouraged all parties to calmly discuss their view of the situation. The parties were encouraged to take a step back and think about what is in the best interest of the daughter. The youth justice coordinator helped facilitate an agreement for the daughter to continue living with her newly found foster parents, while her mother was allowed to visit on weekends and big breaks (Walker, 2012). This collaborative approach arguably had a better outcome compared to adverse legal proceedings that can negatively affect children and families (Block, 2010).

Restorative practices have been used in the child welfare systems of multiple countries. Fox (2009) indicated that family group conferences are used in child welfare cases to resolve conflict in England. Beck and colleagues (2010) mention New Zealand's use of family group conferencing to positively impact child welfare cases. Moreover, Lehmann and colleagues (2012) noted that about 40 child welfare studies of the use of family group decision making have demonstrated that engaging family members in decision making resulted in improved child outcomes.

EPIC 'Ohana offers conferencing and facilitates the E Makua Ana Youth Circle program for current and former foster care youth in Hawaii. The Youth Circle program is youth-driven and solution-focused, and results in a plan for independence. The youth decides who will attend (the support team), how the circle will open, what food will be served, and ultimately, what the plan for independence will comprise. The team meets with the youth for 2-3 hours and generates

options across key areas for the youth including, housing, finances, education, employment, etc. The transition plan resulting from the meeting is then shared with the youth and team members (EPIC ‘Ohana, Inc., n.d.). The program offered by EPIC ‘Ohana served as an inspiration and reference point for some aspects of the current HOPE Court model; namely, the virtual vision board workshops. Representatives from EPIC ‘Ohana were consulted early in the development phase of the HOPE Court program.

Restorative Justice in Criminal Courts

Perhaps the most widely used application of restorative justice occurs in the criminal justice system. Restorative justice has been used worldwide, engaging police, prosecutors, judges, probation officers, prison, parole officers and other stakeholders (Van Ness, 2005). Police in South Africa implemented a restorative justice project with the Community Peace Committee to offer adult offenders an opportunity to learn from their mistakes and demonstrate good conduct (Sharma, n.d.). Austria allowed for prosecutors to lead a restorative process that can in turn decrease the sentence of an adult who has less than five years of incarceration (Löschnig-Gspandl, 2001). After the Supreme Court decision in *United States v. Booker*, Judge Gernter publicly raised the need for restorative justice in the federal justice system (Luna & Poulson, 2006). In a meta-analytic review of restorative practices in criminal court, across 22 different restorative justice programs, group conferencing and victim offender mediation were found to increase offender satisfaction, increase victim satisfaction, increase offender compliance, and decrease offender recidivism (Latimer et al., 2005).

Even after an individual is found guilty and incarcerated, restorative practices have been employed. Peace tables were created in a Columbian prison to encourage gang leaders to discuss and resolve disputes (Van Ness, 2005). In correctional facilities within the U.S., different

mediation techniques have been used to address conflict and improve the relationship between prison staff and prisoners (Roeger, 2003).

Restorative Justice in Juvenile Justice Cases

Restorative practices have been utilized in juvenile justice systems across the world (Van Ness, 2005). For example, in New Zealand, legislation was passed to give police the power to refer juvenile offenders to a restorative alternative (Morris & Maxwell, 2017). Through this approach, youth offenders are given a chance to make amends by making an apology to the victim, carrying out community service, or paying restitution.

Rodriguez (2007) found that juvenile participants in a restorative justice program in Arizona had lower recidivism rates to compared to youth in a comparison group. The program had a greater effect with girls, first-time offenders, and offenders with one previous offense. A meta-analysis of 84 evaluations conducted within 60 research studies, restorative justice programs, compared with traditional juvenile justice programs, demonstrated a moderate reduction in delinquent behavior (Wilson et al., 2017). The authors also found substantial delinquency outcome effects for programs that used victim-offender conferencing, family group conferencing, arbitration/mediation programs, and circle sentencing. However, outcomes were more modest for studies that employed random assignment. Youth and victims involved with restorative justice programs had a greater perception that the process was fair and were more satisfied with the court process compared with youth in traditional juvenile courts.

Child Maltreatment Incidence

Approximately 600,000 to 676,000 cases of substantiated child maltreatment are reported in the U.S. each year (Lawler et al., 2016; Zeanah et al., 2018). It is estimated that around 37 percent of children will experience a child protective services investigation by the age of 18, with

African American children having the highest rate (53.0%) and Asians/Pacific Islander children having the lowest rate (10.2%; Kim et al., 2017). There were 3.9 million total referrals of maltreatment claims that were reported in 2020 that included around 7.1 million children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, 2022). Also, almost 22% of children who had maltreatment referrals were removed from their homes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was assumed that there would be a spike in child maltreatment cases; however, there was a 27 percent decrease in reports (Baron et al., 2020). This may have occurred as a significant portion of maltreatment cases are typically referred by mandated reporters in school; in 2018, of the over 4.3 million cases of child maltreatment reported, approximately 20 percent were reported by school staff (Baron et al., 2020). In addition, research found that areas with a greater percentage of their population remaining home during the pandemic had a higher incidence of child maltreatment, consisting primarily of neglect, compared to areas with fewer people staying home (Bullinger et al., 2021). It is important to note that emergency rooms, although reporting a decrease in overall visits by children, had an increase in visits due to accidental injuries for children. Many of these injuries could be classified as neglect as parents often left their children unattended during the time they were injured (Bullinger et al., 2021).

Dependency Court

Dependency court hears cases pertaining to minors involving child abuse or neglect allegations. In these proceedings, the court makes decisions about the child such as if they will be removed from the custody of the caregiver and the circumstances by which the child may return. The primary goal of dependency court is to provide for the welfare and safety of the

child. In the U.S., there are over 300 dependency courts specifically for prioritizing the safety and reunification of youth (Ahlin et al., 2021). In certain high-risk situations, a dependency court case may occur simultaneously with a criminal court case, as many of these high-risk situations involve physical or sexual abuse (Hobbs et al., 2014). Cases can involve neglect, abuse, and criminal activity (Bottoms et al., 2009).

Although these cases revolve around the well-being of the child, in many cases the child is not present during their dependency court hearing. Additionally, if the child is present, they will often not take the stand. The child is often informed of the ruling after the court has made a decision by the State official assigned to them (Quas et al., 2009). Post-response services from the applicable child protective services agency are often provided to families and child victims going through dependency court. Services are typically provided based on assessments of the family's situation and needs and post-response services were given to approximately 60% of cases in 2020 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, 2022), with over 1.1 million children receiving services.

Impact on Youth

Traumatic events experienced by youth may have lifelong impacts; specifically, trauma can lead to severe mental health problems such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depressive disorders, and anxiety disorders. In fact, young adults who were in the foster care system experience PTSD at twice the rate of Vietnam War veterans (Kerns et al., 2014). Over 90% of youth involved with the justice system report having at least one trauma (Rosenberg et al., 2014). They also have high incidence of specific mental health issues including PTSD (over 45%), depression (almost 50%), and substance abuse (roughly 61%).

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) refer to chronic or severely stressful experiences, such as domestic violence, discrimination, and parent death, that occur before 18 years of age. Greater exposure to ACEs has been associated with poor mental health and health outcomes in childhood and adulthood (Loria & Caughy, 2018; Anda et al. 2020). Not surprisingly, a strong association has been found between the occurrence of child maltreatment and ACEs (Brown et al., 2019). In addition, certain types of maltreatment tend to coincide with each other such as emotional maltreatment and caregiver divorce or broad household dysfunction and family violence. Moreover, the experience of dependency court itself often causes significant unintentional stress for youth (Kletzka & Siegfried, 2008).

Many youth who enter the dependency court system remain involved with the justice system as juvenile delinquents or adult criminals. These children are often referred to as crossover youth, or youth who engage in delinquent behavior after being maltreated during their childhood (Herz et al., 2010). Youth who have been maltreated during childhood are more likely to commit offenses later in life (Ryan et al., 2013). Studies have shown that anywhere from 9% to 29% of children in the child welfare system engage in delinquent behavior during their lifetime (Herz et al., 2010). Of the juveniles who commit crimes, about a third are still in an active dependency case during their first arrest (Ryan et al., 2013). Herz et al. (2010) found that half of the juveniles reported having some type of mental health issues and approximately a fifth of them were abusing alcohol and drugs.

As indicated previously, many of the children in the child welfare system experienced neglect or abuse. Around 90% of homeless youth report at least one type of maltreatment from a caregiver before they had left home (Bender et al., 2014). Abuse from a caregiver is one of the main factors contributing to youth homelessness (Britton & Pilnik, 2018) and homelessness

increases the likelihood of youth committing crimes later in life (Bender et al., 2014). Of homeless youth from the ages 18 to 24, around 78% have been arrested and approximately 60% have gone to jail (Yoder et al., 2014).

Child Experiences of Dependency Court

One study found that many children in dependency court have a limited understanding of proceedings taking place (Cooper, 2010). Although youth involved in the court system generally have a better understanding of judicial terminology and the overall court process compared to those who have never experienced it, many who had been in the system the longest still had areas or aspects of the process that they did not comprehend.

Additionally, maltreated youth often experience negative feelings towards the dependency court process as a whole (Block et al., 2010). The greater their understanding of the legal system, the higher their level of negative emotions regarding the judicial system (Block et al., 2010). Also, Cooper (2010) found that children are more likely to report higher levels of distress and anxiety over a lack of understanding of judicial procedures and terminology. Although many youth tend to experience negative emotions regarding the court system, they generally had positive emotions related to seeing family members in court (Block et al., 2010; Hobbs et al., 2014).

Restorative Practices and Dependency Court

There is no extant research literature regarding the use of restorative practices in dependency court. However, the utilization of restorative justice across other settings such as the education and judicial systems can provide insight into the role it can have in dependency courts. The purpose of this research study was to investigate HOPE Court, an alternative to the current dependency system in Broward County for older teens. It utilizes restorative practices to

ensure foster care youth have a say in the dependency court process and their transition plan, and that they have a connected support network of adults to help them successfully transition into independent living conditions. Through participation in HOPE Court, a youth's relationship with social workers, service providers, and the legal system is established and maintained using restorative practices and community building.

Methodology

An exploratory case study using an embedded single-case design (Yin, 2018) bounded by time (one year) and place (HOPE Court) was used to examine the implementation of HOPE Court with an initial cohort of 10 youth (Cohort 1). This approach was utilized to determine:

1. How restorative practices are utilized in a dependency court process.
2. How youth and stakeholders experience a dependency court program that utilizes restorative practices.
3. How restorative practices impact youth and stakeholders in the dependency system.

Participants

A purposive sampling approach was used to identify participants representing "subunits" of the single case (HOPE Court). Participants consisted of 10 youth enrolled in HOPE Court and 21 adults (stakeholders) working in, or affiliated with HOPE Court. Stakeholders consisted of Child Advocates (Case Managers), Life Coaches, Guardians ad Litem, Attorneys ad litem, and other professionals within HOPE Court. Youth participants entered HOPE Court between the ages of 16 and 17 years old. Given the variation in circumstances surrounding guardianship for youth (e.g., termination of parental rights, parents' whereabouts unknown), steps were implemented to ensure approval from the appropriate guardian was secured prior to approaching

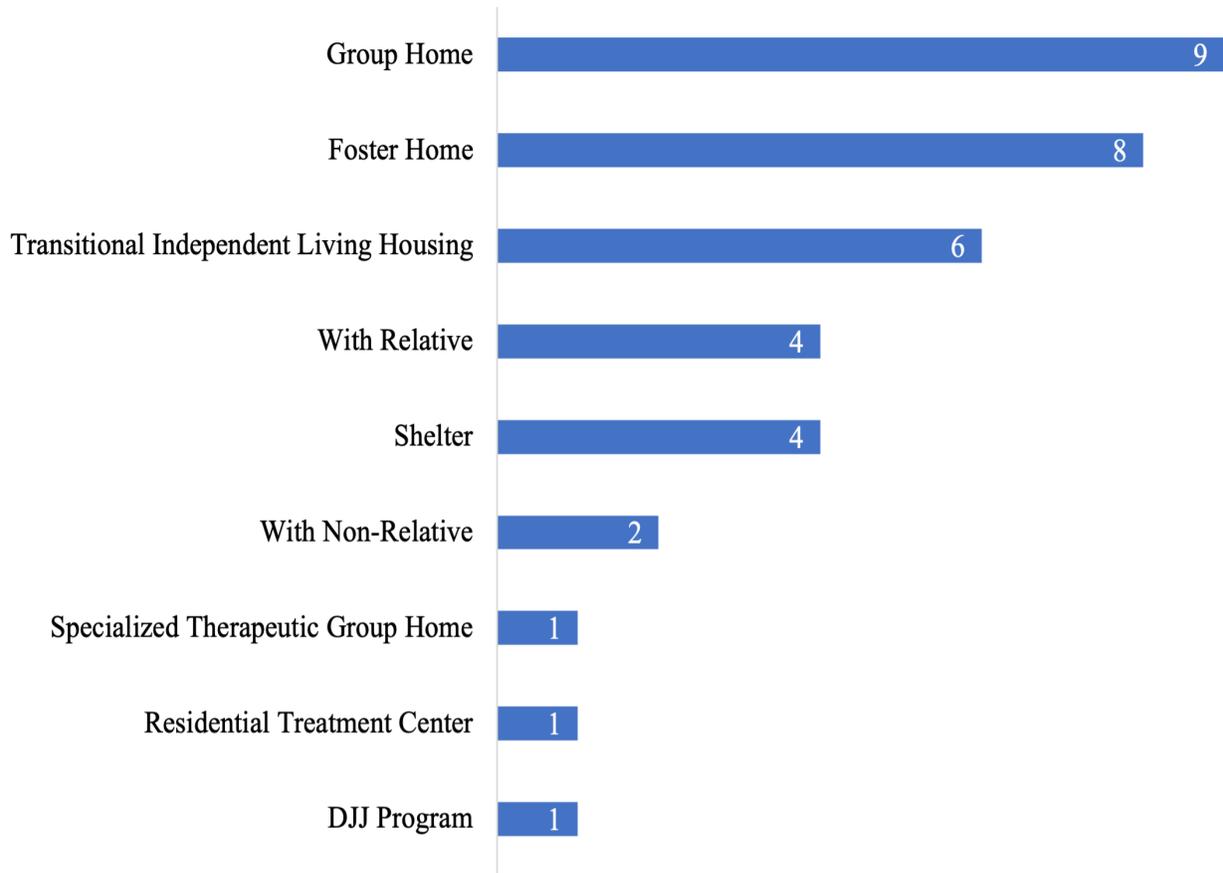
the youth to participate in the study. Stakeholders (e.g., Judge, Case Manager/Social Workers, Guardians Ad Litem, Life Coaches, Attorneys, etc.) were recruited via email communication sent by the researchers. Specifically, an email was sent by a member of the research team to all staff/affiliates of HOPE Court with information about the study and contact information of the researchers. Potential stakeholder participants were asked to contact the researchers with any questions or if they would like to participate in the study. Approval of the research protocol was obtained from the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) Human Protections Review Committee (HPRC) prior to conducting the study.

Demographics

Youth participant demographics were collected using a Demographic and History Form, which was completed by the youth's Child Advocate (Case Manager). This form was administered to provide additional context for youth participants, including experience with placements and history of adverse events. No identifying information was collected on the form and a research ID number was used instead of the participant's name.

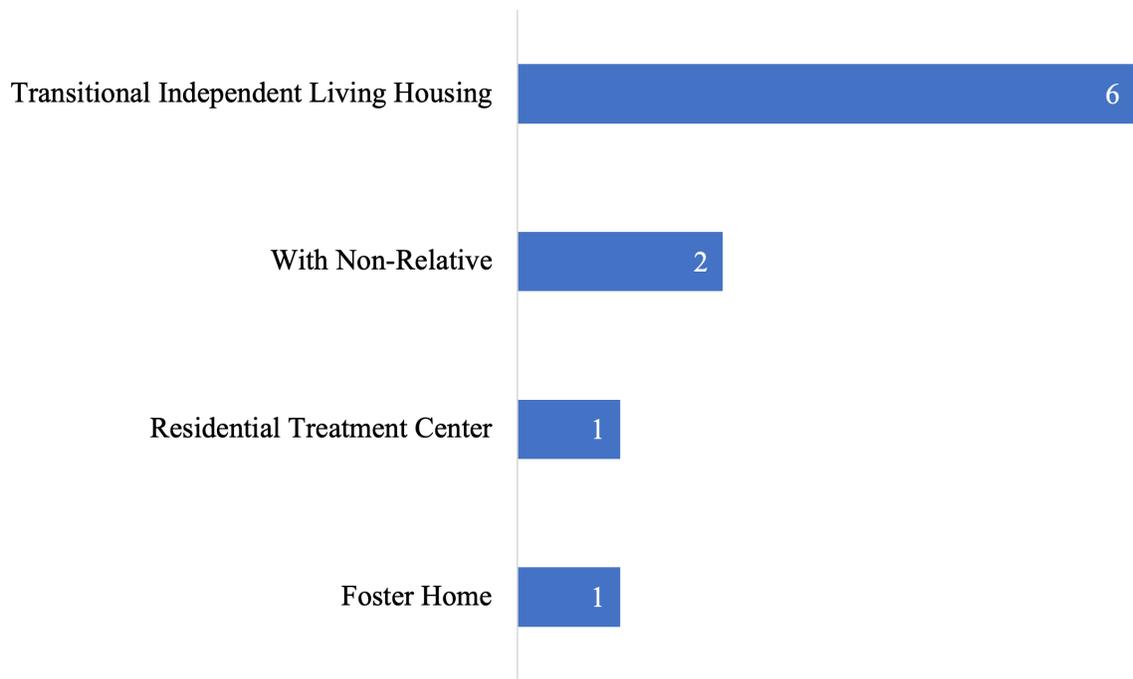
Based on demographic information collected, the mean number of years that youth participants had been in care was 5 years ($SD = 3.1$). Additionally, the mean number of placements since coming into care was 6.5 ($SD = 4.6$). Figure 1 shows the frequency and types of placements for all the youth participants since coming into care.

Figure 1
Types of placements since coming into care (n = 10)



Youth participants were reported to be in their current placements for an average of 4 months (see Figure 2 for the types of current placements). Six out of 10 (60%) youth were reportedly currently placed in transitional independent living housing, 2 participants (20%) were living with a non-relative, 1 participant was living in a Residential Treatment Center (RTC) and 1 participant was residing in a foster home.

Figure 2
Youth participants' current placements (n = 10)



Regarding education, the highest grade completed, and current educational setting are presented below in Figures 3 and 4, respectively.

Figure 3
Highest grade completed (n = 10)

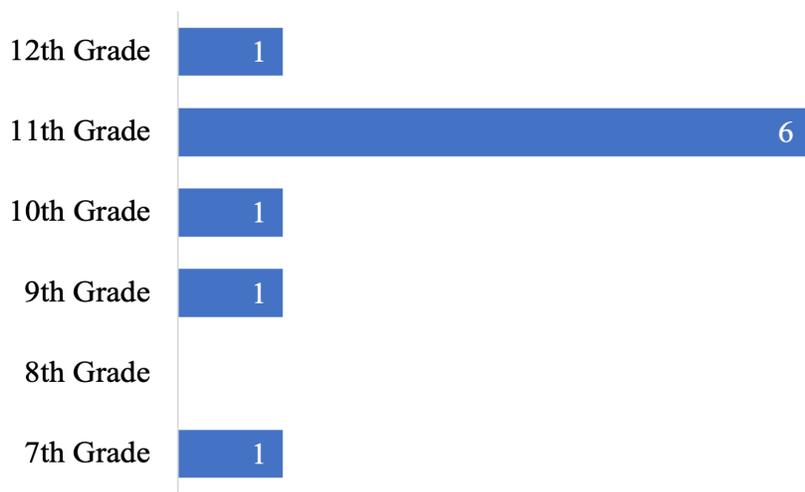
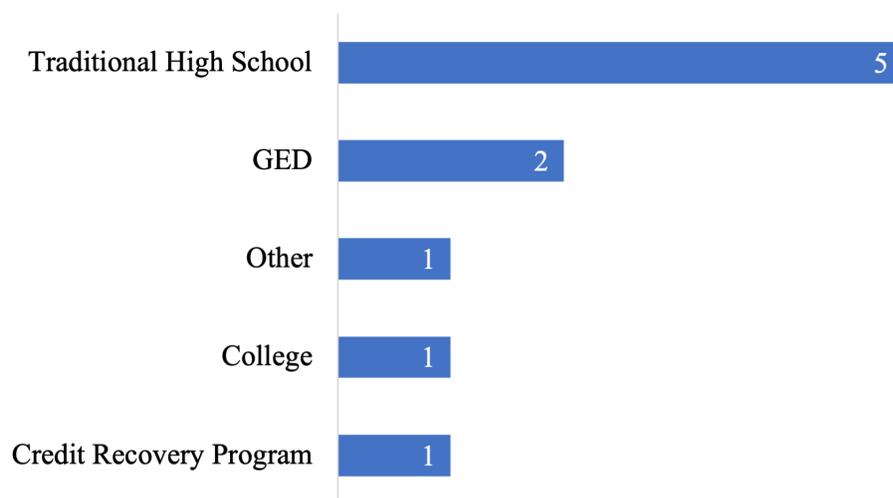


Figure 4

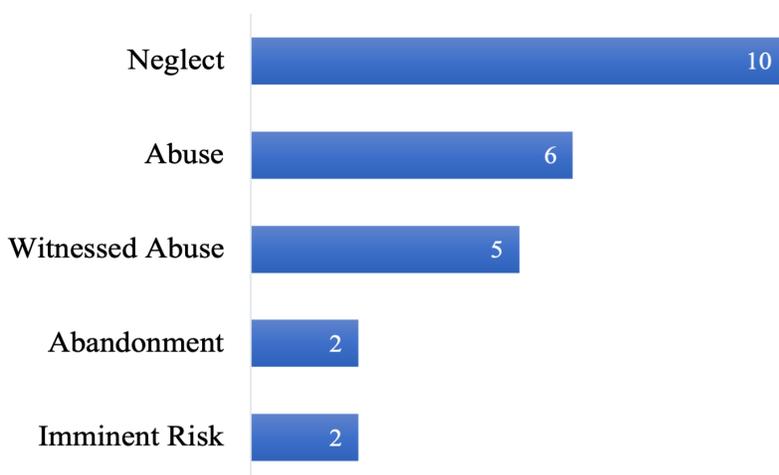
Current educational setting (n = 10)



Experiences prior to coming into care varied by participant and are reported below in Figure 5. All of the participants were reported to have experienced neglect, 6 participants (60%) experienced abuse, 5 participants (50%) witnessed abuse, 2 participants experienced abandonment (20%), and 2 youth (20%) were deemed to be at imminent risk of abuse, abandonment or neglect at the time they entered care. Regarding past delinquency, 3 out of 10 (30%) were reported to have a history of delinquency.

Figure 5

Experiences Prior to Entering Care



Instrumentation

The youth and stakeholder interview protocols, HOPE Court Youth Participant Survey, and Demographic and History form used in the study of cohort 1 were developed by the research team with input from individuals with expertise in restorative practices, survey development and qualitative research, as well as professionals with substantial experience in the dependency system. Instrument development was guided by current dependency system practices and assessments in Florida, restorative practices principles, and the aims of the research.

HOPE Court Youth Participant Survey. Youth participants completed the HOPE Court Youth Participant Survey once they had completed approximately eight months of HOPE Court. The survey, which assesses participants' perceptions of their engagement with the Court, their support network, and other services provided, consists of 20 “yes/no” response items and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. Participants are asked to “Please answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in response to each of the following statements related to your experiences with HOPE Court. If you are not sure how to answer, say ‘I don’t know.’” See Appendix B for HOPE Court Youth Participant Survey results.

Youth Interview Protocol. The HOPE Court Youth Participant Interview Protocol consists of six questions including prompts, which asks youth about their experiences with multiple aspects of HOPE Court (see Appendix C for the Youth Participant Interview Protocol).

Stakeholder Interview Protocol. The HOPE Court Stakeholder Interview Protocol consists of ten questions including prompts, which asks stakeholders about their experiences with multiple aspects of HOPE Court (see Appendix D for the Stakeholder Participant Interview Protocol).

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were collected, which is a strength of case study research and allows for “an in-depth study of a phenomenon in its real-world context” (Yin, 2018, p. 127). These included the utilization of the HOPE Court Youth Participant Survey, Youth Demographic Form, court observations, and semi-structured interviews with HOPE Court youth and stakeholders.

Youth participants were administered the HOPE Court Youth Participant Survey and an individual semi-structured interview once they completed approximately eight months of HOPE Court. The survey assessed participants’ perceptions of their engagement with the court, their support network, and other services provided. A member of the research team scheduled a day and time to conduct the interview and administer the assessment via Zoom that was convenient to the participant (e.g., after their pre-court listening circles session). The survey questions were read to the participant and the survey form was completed by the research team member. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate the interview and included questions related to participants' experience of the HOPE Court program.

Stakeholders (Judge, Case Managers, Guardians Ad Litem, foster parents, and other HOPE Court adult staff/participants) were asked to participate in an individual interview at approximately eight to ten months from the start of HOPE Court. The interviews took place via Zoom at a time that was convenient to the participant. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate the interview and included questions related to stakeholders' experience of the HOPE Court program.

Observations of HOPE Court proceedings took place once every six weeks via Zoom. Field notes were generated during observations and analyzed to better understand the implementation of HOPE Court and utilization of restorative practices in the dependency court process.

A participant demographic and history form was also completed one time by the youth participant's case manager/social worker and provided to the research team. The participant demographic and history form included the reason the youth entered the child welfare system (e.g., abuse, neglect, abandonment), the number and type of placements, history of delinquency, and level of education.

Data Analysis

Using a data analysis spiral (Creswell, 2013), interview transcripts were read by the investigators and notes/memos were generated as the transcripts/notes were initially reviewed. The next step in the data analysis process consisted of segmenting the text and assigning a descriptive label (i.e., code) to each segment. According to Gibbs (2018), “coding is a way of indexing or categorizing the text in order to establish a framework of thematic ideas about it” (p.54). Codes derived from the text were both “a priori” and “in vivo.” Open coding entails extracting from the data what is happening without imposing interpretation based on preconceptions. The next step in the analytic process was the grouping of codes into categories, to connect the codes and to attribute meaning (interpretation) to the units of data to generate themes (Creswell, 2013).

The data analysis resulted in the following main theme: HOPE Court represented a substantial change in the dependency court paradigm. The following subthemes also emerged:

1. Youth are more engaged and have a voice in the dependency process (youth-centered process).
2. Frequent, quality contact and a collaborative approach are key to a positive experience for youth.
3. Youth have a reliable support network of trusted adults in their transition to adulthood.

Results

The results of the data analysis are presented below by theme and subthemes, followed by a discussion regarding the integration of restorative practices in HOPE Court and their effect on youth outcomes. The following main theme is reported, HOPE Court represented a substantial change in the dependency court paradigm; followed by the three subthemes, (a) youth are engaged and have a voice in the dependency process (youth-centered process); (b) frequent, quality contact and a collaborative approach are key; and (c) youth have a reliable support network of trusted adults in their transition to adulthood.

HOPE Court Represented a Substantial Change in the Dependency Court Paradigm

Stakeholder participants indicated that the implementation of HOPE Court, which infuses restorative practices into the dependency court process, represented a substantial change in the dependency court paradigm; namely, it represented a needed shift away from the “adversarial” model that is typically present in dependency court. Participants described the adversarial model as an environment in dependency court in which each party is advocating and competing for their own interests often resulting in conflict rather than collaboration. One stakeholder noted that with the adversarial model,

There's an inherent problem, because when you look at healthy functioning families, they do not raise children or they do not function through conflict. It's not how healthy families are raised and yet we take kids in care and say okay well, we'll run you through a conflict, we'll lawyer, everyone will lawyer up and we'll make our arguments. That's, that's antithetical to, or perhaps incompatible with the way healthy families are raised, if they were not involved in the dependency system so I think that that's the key that HOPE Court has to offer. It mirrors much more what a healthy family would do with the young adult.

In contrast to the "adversarial model" described by stakeholders, HOPE Court focuses primarily on employing relationship and community building to connect the youth with a team of trusted adults, who are all working toward the same goal of a successful transition to adulthood for the youth. Another stakeholder noted,

"What's going well? Number one, I love the team aspect of it, so again in a normal court setting in dependency there's not really a team. It's like different lawyers and different parties mostly advocating for different things and HOPE Court, it's a team environment where we're all pushing the child to the same finish line. Most times, I mean I don't, I can't really, I haven't heard of a situation where there were conflicting interests in the HOPE Court setting so that was awesome to not have to worry about litigating and just focusing on what this kid needs, I think was a huge benefit of being in HOPE Court."

Youth participants also noted significant differences between HOPE Court and typical dependency court, particularly related to: (1) working with a team of adults, rather than individual professionals; (2) the engagement and support they felt from the adults on their HOPE Court team; (3) the focus on the youth, thereby instilling the feeling that the

youth has a voice in the process; and (4) the adults in HOPE Court genuinely care for the well-being of the youth. One youth participant stated,

It's different from before in how they help. I feel like the help seems more genuine than forced...like before it just feels, people, like they would just help because it's their job and that's what they have to do, but in HOPE Court it's like they help because they genuinely mean it, like, 'if you need help, I will help you. Like, you could call me and I will help you with anything.'

Youth are Engaged and Have a Voice in the Dependency Process (Youth-Centered Process)

Stakeholders described HOPE Court as a youth-centered process and noted that youth have a voice and are engaged with HOPE Court at a level not typically seen in traditional dependency court. HOPE Court hearings were described by stakeholders as more “informal,” “comfortable” and “relaxed” than traditional dependency court hearings. Each hearing is scripted to ensure consistent integration of restorative practices and begins with an ice breaker question, which stakeholders indicated helps to “break down walls” and “humanize” the HOPE Court professionals, including the Judge, and helps youth feel more “open.”

As noted in observations of court hearings, examples of ice breaker questions included, “If you could choose between flying and invisibility, which superpower would you choose?” and “Would you rather be the author of a best-selling book or a star in a movie?” All members of the youth’s team and youth answer the ice breaker question and the tone to the responses was observed to be consistently relaxed and jovial across each HOPE Court hearing. Stakeholders noted that hearings are youth-led, and that youth are the primary respondents to the Judge’s questions in HOPE Court. Youth are given the chance to speak first, and then supportive professionals are given the chance to ask

questions and comment. Stakeholders indicated that this approach has increased the engagement of youth in the dependency process and has also improved the accuracy of information received. One stakeholder stated,

Oftentimes, the child rarely spoke in regular dependency court or if the child did speak, if it was a child that was having conflicts, they're having conflict at home, at the group home, or having conflict with the foster parent, or having conflict with their child advocate, oftentimes everybody else would be able to speak about that conflict first and then the Judge would say to the child sort of like what's your position. And I've had many clients who shut down because everybody else has spoken for him or her and told their perspective.

Youth interviews and survey results also reflected engagement with the HOPE Court process. All ten of the youth participants answered "yes" on the following survey items: (1) I attend my HOPE Court hearings, (2) I'm ok asking questions when I am in the courtroom, (3) I'm ok with sharing my thoughts when I am in the courtroom, (4) My concerns are heard and addressed in the courtroom, and (13) During my time in HOPE Court, I felt seen, heard, and valued by my Judge and support team (see Appendix A for HOPE Court Participant Survey results).

One youth participant stated in the interview, "in HOPE Court I haven't experienced nothing like it, it was like they actually listen to you." Both stakeholder and youth participants noted a difference from typical dependency court in that they have a say in the process and their voices are heard. A stakeholder participant stated, "...with HOPE Court everybody's allowed to speak. Everyone's a part of the conversation on the table; everybody's able to contribute." One youth participant noted that in HOPE Court, "I'm able to talk more and voice my opinion and I'm able to be more independent and verbal

and get my point across.”

Stakeholders commented on the progression toward increased engagement of youth in HOPE Court, which was particularly noted in youth attendance and attentiveness to upcoming meetings/hearings, and youth proactively requesting meetings (circles) with their support team. Additionally, stakeholders noted that in the beginning, when youth were asked if they would like to answer the ice-breaker question first or last, they tended to choose to go last, whereas over time, youth increasingly offered to go first. One stakeholder believes that the trend toward youth volunteering to go first speaks to,

...engagement, the comfort level and them being, wanting to be more active in their process because prior to HOPE Court and outside of HOPE Court, most decisions are made about the youth. We don't make decisions; in HOPE Court we make decisions with the youth. The youth is kind of the driver, and it makes sense because once we all drop out of their lives, once they move on, they're going to have to be making those decisions so it's really important to get them to help them make it in a safe space right, versus just doing everything for them and then pushing them out and hoping for the best.

Frequent, High-Quality Contact and a Collaborative Approach are Important

The frequency and quality of contact as well as a collaborative approach were reported by stakeholders and youth to be key positive aspects of HOPE Court and successful transition. In HOPE Court, youth are provided more time in the transition to independent living (TIL) process; namely, youth enter HOPE Court just before, or at the time of their 17th birthday to allow sufficient time to establish relationships with their HOPE Court team, learn critical independent living skills and gain necessary knowledge to prepare them for adulthood. Hearings are held every 6 weeks, as opposed to every 6 months, which is typical

for standard dependency court. Additionally, the youth and the youth's HOPE Court team, which may comprise the youth's Child Advocate (Case Manager), Attorneys, Guardian ad Litem, Life Coach, caregivers, etc., meet prior to each hearing in a pre-court listening circle to discuss the status of the youth and address any issues as they arise utilizing empathy and non-violent communication. Both youth and stakeholder participants indicated that pre-court circles were helpful in preparing for the upcoming court hearing and in resolving any issues or conflicts prior to the hearing. Stakeholders indicated that this was helpful to facilitate a common understanding regarding the status of the youth, keep apprised of any changes or challenges, and work collaboratively to meet the youth's needs. Moreover, addressing challenges or conflicts in the pre-court listening circles prevented surprises and allowed for a more productive and positive experience in the court hearing. One stakeholder participant stated that regarding the pre-court listening circles,

It's been great. I think that it's been great because it allows youth to be part of the planning process, you know it's, it's their life, it's not you know up to us adults and professionals to plan it for them, so it gives them that voice, that chance to be you know be seen, heard, and understood, so that's a great experience. They can express themselves freely, express their concerns freely. They're open to feedback. It creates a segue I think to the first step for them advocating for themselves.

Another stakeholder noted,

I think the court hearings also have been going really well. I do not think that they have been overly burdensome in terms of time, in fact, I think that we have had far, far less emergency motions and emergency scheduled hearings because of HOPE Court because of how frequently we're meeting and the way in which we're meeting and I think the circle, the pre-court circles are absolutely necessary.

Youth Have a Reliable Support Network of Trusted Adults in their Transition to Adulthood

Interviews with both youth and stakeholders revealed that in HOPE Court, youth have a reliable support network of trusted adults in their transition to adulthood. Both youth and stakeholders pointed to the “team” as an important aspect of HOPE Court, with all professionals communicating and collaborating effectively to ensure the youth’s needs are met and they are prepared to successfully transition to adulthood. The professionals involved with each youth represent an expanded team, compared to what would be seen in typical dependency court. The HOPE Court team also includes a mentor or life coach, who can provide additional guidance through the transition to independent living. One youth participant gave the following response when asked about his favorite part of HOPE Court:

I don’t know, just talking to everybody on there I guess; you know like me talking about my goals and stuff and like you know, them just giving advice and stuff like that, it’s uh, it’s pretty cool, I guess. But it’s just like, the one thing I like about HOPE Court is that you have a whole team of people that’s kind of there for you, you know like help you out, like if you have any problems, like any questions and stuff. I guess it’s just better to have like a whole team rather than like 1 or 2 people cause it’s like when you have a whole team you have like, they can all like um, they can all kind of like pitch in and put in like their viewpoint about something and it’s just like, I don’t know I feel like it’s just better.

On the HOPE Court Participant Survey all of the youth participants answered “yes” to the following items: (5) I can talk to someone from my HOPE Court team if I feel stressed, sad, or angry; (7) Someone from my HOPE Court team will help me if I have problems with

my foster care placement, and (19) HOPE Court helped me to feel supported in the process of learning about my transition to independent living. Nine out of 10 (90%) of youth participants answered “yes” to the following item: 6) Someone from my HOPE Court team will help me if I’m sick or hurt (1 out of 10; 10% answered “I don’t know”). When asked in the interview about her favorite part of HOPE Court, one youth participant stated,

That everyone is so nice, they actually listen to you, they actually care. Um, they ask questions, and they let me ask questions. Everyone talks and like it’s just yeah no one talks over anybody, its like professional and actually like I’m professional with them and like they’re intelligent, you know how it feels to talk to a lot of wise people?... like that’s how it feels.

Youth also indicated through individual interviews that they “trust” and felt “supported,” “heard” and “understood” by their HOPE Court teams.

Summary of Integration of Restorative Practices in HOPE Court

As indicated previously, HOPE Court is grounded in a restorative practices approach. Through interviews and observations, restorative practices were evident across interventions and activities within HOPE Court. Youth in HOPE Court were provided with an expanded team, which included a mentor or life coach, and frequent contact beginning approximately 1 year prior to the youth’s 18th birthday. Court hearings were held every 6 weeks to facilitate communication and community building with the youth and team members. According to Costello et al. (2019), “circles are a powerful process to proactively build bonds and a community. They create space to increase social capital and develop norms. Circles also provide a forum to respond to conflict and wrongdoing” (p. 22). Circles were used within core activities, including court hearings, pre-court listening circles, and restorative conferencing or conflict

circles, as needed. Each court hearing started with an ice-breaker question and circle “go-around,” whereby each participant (youth, judge, and team members) answered the ice-breaker question. Given that hearings were all held on Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions, a “talking piece” (symbolic object held by the person talking, which ensures only one person talks at a time) could not be utilized; however, hearings were observed to be relaxed and respectful, with youth and team members all having an opportunity to speak without interruption. Additionally, although the courtroom could not be organized in a physical “circle,” given the nature of Zoom (i.e., no hierarchical structure or layout) and through the efforts of the judge, program administrators and team members, the intended effect of sitting in a “circle” appeared to be realized. Specifically, youth and stakeholders reported feeling comfortable, relaxed, connected, valued, and that their voices were heard. One stakeholder noted,

Overall, I think that the kids feel connected, and I think it seems to me, and again, maybe I’m biased but seems to me that they enjoy the hearings, and I think that again that’s buy-in from the kids and which long term, you know a lot of this was restoring their faith in the system, right? That this is a system that traditionally a lot of these kids feel like has let them down or you know, whatever. And when you have a child who’s logging in 10 minutes early for their hearing and wants to participate, it’s a far cry from a child who previously didn’t even want to see anybody from court and hates their child advocate, so...

Court hearings were youth-led, with the youth conversing with the judge and answering questions directly, prior to attorneys and other team members providing input or asking questions. Judicial scripts were created prior to each hearing to ensure fidelity to restorative practices. Pre-court listening circles also took place prior to each hearing. These

meetings, which included the youth and all members of the support team, afforded an opportunity to facilitate communication with the youth and team members and address any issues which may have surfaced prior to the court hearing. Restorative practices, which were evident via the pre-court listening circles, included an initial feelings “check-in.” This involved a circle go-around at the start of each meeting, and included discussions of “celebrations” and “mournings.”

One stakeholder noted that through HOPE Court, they are striving for “high levels of support, along with high levels of expectation...” and also stated that, “there is a lot less conflict and challenge sometimes presented, because we are all working together as a community, all the time.” According to Costello et al. (2019), “by engaging young people, we can hold them accountable in an active way. Then we are doing things *with* them. But when we hand out punishments, we are doing things *to* them. Or when we take care of their problems and make no demands, we are doing things *for* them” (p. 49). As evidenced via observations and interviews with stakeholders and youth, HOPE Court team members consistently work *with* the youth. In the time between court hearings and pre-court listening circles, team members collaborate (with the youth and each other) to ensure the youth’s needs are met and they are connected with independent living skills instruction and support. Youth are paired with a member of their adult support team to meet a specific need or accomplish a task and follow up and expressions of gratitude take place in each pre-court listening circles meeting.

With regard to independent living skills instruction and support, youth were offered a series of monthly independent living workshops via Zoom and pre-recorded video and provided a monetary incentive for attendance. Adult HOPE Court team members

contributed to workshops; for example, several HOPE Court team members were featured in a video to demonstrate independent living skills related to cooking, household maintenance, etc. Despite the incentive, attendance at the independent living workshops was variable. For example, the workshop on finance and budgeting was relatively well-attended, while others had fewer attendees.

Youth also participated in a virtual vision board workshop with their team members to engage in goal setting and develop a plan for their transition to independent living. The virtual vision board workshop process utilized in HOPE Court was adapted from EPIC ‘Ohana’s E Makua Ana Youth Circle program. In the workshop, one adult team member facilitates the session and one adult team member serves as the “scribe” to document goals and steps to achieve goals. Virtual vision board workshops were held via Zoom, due to COVID-19, and team members collaborated using a shared MS Word document to track goal-setting and goal-related tasks in the session. The process is youth-driven and solution-focused, and results in a TIL plan, which is provided to the youth and participants following the virtual vision board workshop session. In reference to the virtual vision board workshops, one stakeholder noted that “it's showing that we're invested and showing that we really are trying to help them achieve their biggest dreams and their goals. That, I think, has been the most effective or the reason why I think they connect with it.” Another stakeholder indicated,

I think that’s been really uplifting for a lot of us too, because we start off with their strengths and we end on a positive note and I mean, I always feel really good after that, even though it’s talking about the youth, but I just, I feel like they’re really empowered with those.

The HOPE Court conceptual model (see Figure 6) was developed as a result of the exploratory case study of HOPE Court cohort 1. Infused throughout the HOPE Court process are the foundational elements, which include:

1. A youth-centered approach in which youth have a voice in the dependency process and in their transition to adulthood;
2. A network of trusted adults to support youth, who are involved in all aspects of HOPE Court;
3. Integration of restorative practices throughout all activities and interventions; and
4. Training of adult team members in restorative practices and utilization of non-violent communication.

Figure 6
HOPE Court Model



Related to youth outcomes, HOPE Court aimed to improved participation rates in the Extended Foster Care (EFC) and Postsecondary Education Supports and Services (PESS) programs, which provide significant financial support, housing, and supportive services to youth once they age out of foster care. For the youth participants of HOPE Court, as of December 31, 2021, 7 participants (70%) remained in EFC, or transferred to the PESS program, 2 participants (20%) were terminated from EFC, and one participant (10%) had voluntarily opted out of EFC (see Figure 7 for the number of HOPE Court youth participants remaining in EFC or PESS, terminated 8 months or after, or opted out as of December 31, 2021). Additionally, all youth who remained in the EFC program continued to voluntarily participate in pre-court circles and court hearings. All youth in PESS participated in pre-court circles and court hearings, voluntarily, until

they graduated to the PESS program. Although the sample size is small ($n = 10$), these initial results suggest the program is meeting its goal of keeping the youth engaged in EFC or PESS.

Figure 7

Number of HOPE Court youth participants remaining in EFC or PESS, terminated 8 months or after, or opted out as of December 31, 2021



According to a review of data from the Department's Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) database covering youth who aged out between 2014 and 2018, between 60% to 70% of youth who were potentially eligible for the program did not participate, opted out before their eligibility period ended, or were terminated and did not return. Additionally, the largest number of opt-outs and unsuccessful terminations occurred in the first two months of participation. This means that a 30 to 40% participation rate was observed for all foster care youth who aged out between 2014-18. In contrast, HOPE Court demonstrated a much higher participation rate (70%). Additionally, as previously noted, the largest number of opt-outs and unsuccessful terminations occurred in the first two months of participation. For the 3 HOPE Court participants (30%) who were terminated from EFC or opted out, the time in EFC prior to termination or opt out was 10 months (termination), 8 months (termination), and 1 month (opted out). Ninety percent (90%) of HOPE Court youth evidenced participation rates exceeding two months. For all youth in HOPE Court remaining in EFC or PESS, as of December 31, 2021, the mean time in EFC was 7 months ($SD = 2.11$) following the youths' 18th birthday. Considering that for all foster care youth

between 2014-2018, termination or opt-out most frequently occurred within 2 months, the time in EFC for all HOPE Court youth, including those who were terminated or opted out represented an improvement on this indicator. Finally, analysis of FSN data revealed that of the 4,789 youth who aged out between 2014-2018, over 42% did not apply for EFC or PESS. In contrast, all the youth in HOPE Court applied for EFC or PESS (or did not “opt out”). It is again important to note that the sample size is small ($n = 10$), limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Discussion

An exploratory case study was conducted of the first cohort of HOPE Court, a dependency court program in Broward County which employs restorative practices to ensure TIL youth have a voice in their dependency court process and transition plan. Restorative legal processes, supportive youth circles, and TIL planning comprise the programmatic components of HOPE Court with the aim of increasing youth engagement in the EFC and PESS programs after their 18th birthday. Data analysis resulted in the following main theme: HOPE Court represented a substantial change in the dependency court paradigm. Namely, HOPE Court represented a shift away from the adversarial model typically seen in dependency court. Additionally, the following three subthemes were identified, (a) youth are engaged and have a voice in the dependency process (youth-centered process); (b) frequent, quality contact and a collaborative approach are key; and (c) youth have a reliable support network of trusted adults in their transition to adulthood. As a result of this initial study, a HOPE Court model was developed (see Figure 6)

which represents the foundational elements, cycle of activities, and the infusion of restorative practices into the dependency court process.

As evidenced in the extant literature, the use of restorative practices has resulted in positive outcomes across disciplines, such as, education (Kline, 2016; Augustine et al., 2018), adult criminal court (Latimer et al., 2005), and juvenile justice (Rodriguez, 2007). Similarly, the use of restorative practices was found to be associated with positive changes related to process aspects and outcomes in the HOPE Court dependency court program. Specifically, youth were reported to be more engaged and have a say in the process and youth felt more supported and “understood” by adults in HOPE Court, when they compared their experiences to traditional dependency court. Notably, the stakeholders also reported that their voices were heard in HOPE Court, which for many stakeholders represented a significant change from previous experiences in typical dependency court. In HOPE Court, all adult team members, including Child Advocates (case managers), Guardians ad Litem, Attorneys, Life Coaches, foster parents, etc. were afforded the opportunity to provide their input during all HOPE Court activities (i.e., court hearings, pre-court listening circles, virtual vision board workshops, etc.).

Regarding the intended outcome of increasing engagement in the EFC and PESS programs following the youth’s 18th birthday, youth engagement appeared to continue after HOPE Court youth turned 18, since 7 participants (70%) had remained in EFC or transferred to the PESS program as of December 31, 2021. Additionally, all youth who remained in the EFC program continued to voluntarily participate in pre-court circles and court hearings. Of the 3 participants (30%) who were terminated from EFC or opted out, the time in EFC prior to termination or opt out was 10 months (termination), 8 months (termination) and 1 month (opted out). For all youth in HOPE Court remaining in EFC or PESS, as of December 31, 2021, the

mean time in EFC was 7 months ($SD = 2.23$) following the youths' 18th birthday. Considering that for all foster care youth between 2014-2018, termination or opt-out most frequently occurred within 2 months, the time in EFC for all HOPE Court youth, including those who were terminated or opted out represented an improvement on this indicator.

Regarding limitations, given that youth participants were interviewed after completing 8 months in the HOPE Court program, participants may have been likely to respond favorably in the qualitative interview to please the interviewer and/or program (i.e., acquiescence bias). To mitigate this, researchers instead of the youth's adult HOPE Court team members conducted the qualitative interviews. Additionally, given that this was a pilot implementation of HOPE Court, the sample size was small and consisted of youth who were selected to participate in HOPE Court. It is important to note that the selection criteria for cohort 1 of HOPE Court only consisted of the following: (a) availability to participate, (b) age of the youth (i.e., as close to age 17 as possible), and (c) youth did not have siblings in dependency court. Given the small sample size, the generalizability of the results to all foster care transition youth are limited. Additional research is needed to further examine the implementation of restorative practices in HOPE Court and the mechanisms which contribute to positive youth outcomes, which were observed in cohort

Notably, although youth were selected to participate in HOPE Court, their experiences mirror those of most foster care youth. All of the participants were reported to have experienced neglect, 6 participants (60%) experienced abuse, 5 participants (50%) witnessed abuse, 2 participants experienced abandonment (20%), and 2 youth (20%) were deemed to be at imminent risk of abuse, abandonment or neglect at the time they entered care. Additionally, 3 out of 10 (30%) were reported to have a history of delinquency. Given that studies have found that many children in dependency court have a limited understanding of proceedings taking place (Cooper,

2010), and that maltreated youth often experience negative feelings towards the dependency court process as a whole (Block et al., 2010), the results of the exploratory case study of HOPE Court are promising. The results suggest the use of restorative practices in the dependency system for youth aging out of foster care may improve youth understanding, attitudes, and engagement with the dependency court process. Additionally, the community building which takes place during the youth's time in HOPE Court appears to carry over beyond the youth's 18th birthday, given the high percentage of youth remaining in EFC and PESS and continuing their participation in HOPE Court activities and hearings.

The results of the cohort 1 study enabled the development of a conceptual framework and propositions to guide a subsequent explanatory case study of HOPE Court using the same design and case boundaries (Yin, 2018). For example, initial findings in the analysis of cohort 1 data suggest that HOPE Court was successful in supporting and meeting the needs of foster care youth in the program and enabling youth to be more engaged and “have a voice” in the dependency system process. An explanatory approach will allow for a closer examination of the aspects of HOPE Court that lead to these positive outcomes. The conceptual framework resulting from this study will be used to guide the utilization and development of additional instruments and protocols to further study HOPE Court as it is implemented with cohort 2.

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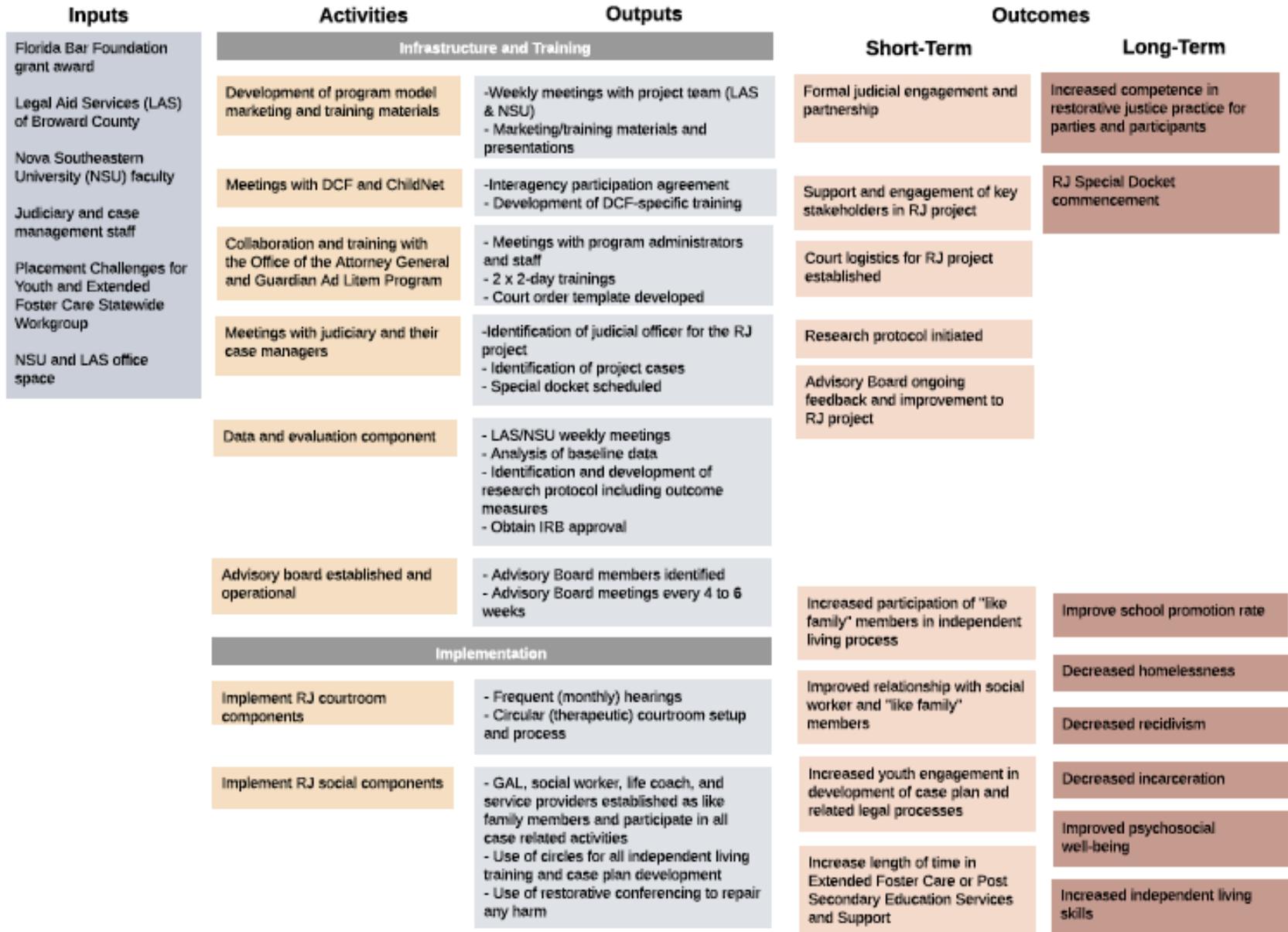
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Appendix A HOPE Court Implementation Logic Model

Legal Aid Service of Broward County, Inc. Restorative Justice Project Implementation Logic Model



Appendix B

HOPE Court Participant Survey Results

Directions: Please answer “yes” or “no” in response to each of the following statements related to your experiences with HOPE Court. If you are not sure how to answer, say “I don’t know.”

HOPE Court Participant Survey Results (n = 10)

| Question | Yes | No | I don't know |
|---|------|-----|--------------|
| 1) I attend my HOPE Court hearings. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 2) I'm ok asking questions when I am in the courtroom. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 3) I'm ok with sharing my thoughts when I am in the courtroom. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 4) My concerns are heard and addressed in the courtroom. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 5) I can talk to someone from my HOPE Court team if I feel stressed, sad, or angry. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 6) Someone from my HOPE Court team will help me if I'm sick or hurt. | 90% | 0% | 10% |
| 7) Someone from my HOPE Court team will help me if I have problems with my foster care placement. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 8) HOPE Court has helped me achieve my school or work goals. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 9) I helped create my HOPE Court Virtual Vision Board. | 90% | 10% | 0% |
| 10) My HOPE Court Virtual Vision Board reflects the life plan that I chose. | 90% | 10% | 0% |
| 11) My Virtual Vision Board workshop helped me to identify my life goals and who can help me accomplish them. | 90% | 10% | 0% |
| 12) HOPE pre-Court listening circles allowed me to participate in the planning of my case. | 90% | 10% | 0% |
| 13) During my time in HOPE Court, I felt seen, heard, and valued by my Judge and support team. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 14) I plan to remain in Extended Foster Care or enter PESS when I turn 18. | 90% | 10% | 0% |
| 15) Once I am living independently, I feel confident I will be able to go to school or find a job. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 16) Once I am living independently, I feel confident I can continue to have positive relationships with others. | 90% | 0% | 10% |
| 17) Once I am living independently, if I need help to make decisions and stay on track, I will contact someone from my HOPE Court team. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 18) HOPE Court workshops have helped me learn some independent living skills (for example, how to pay my bills and how to take care of myself). | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 19) HOPE Court helped me to feel supported in the process of learning about my transition to independent living. | 100% | 0% | 0% |
| 20) HOPE Court helped me to feel hopeful about my future. | 100% | 0% | 0% |

Appendix C

HOPE Court Youth Participant Interview Protocol

- 1) What has HOPE Court been like for you?
 - a. How has HOPE Court been different from your previous court experiences?
 - b. How did participation in HOPE Court make you feel (for example, happy, hopeful, sad, angry) and why did it make you feel that way?
 - c. What has it been like with the judge?
 - d. What was it like attending your court hearings on Zoom?
- 2) Tell me about your Virtual Vision Board. Have you created a Vision Board? If so, what was it like for you to participate in that workshop?
- 3) Tell me about the relationship you have with your Child Advocate. Has that relationship changed at all over time? If so, in what ways has the relationship changed?
 - a. Tell me about the relationship you have developed with other adults in HOPE Court (attorney ad litem, guardian ad litem, life coach).
- 4) As you know, HOPE Court uses circles for many activities. Have you participated in circles? If so, what has it been like for you?
- 5) What was your favorite part of HOPE Court? Is there anything you would like to change, or ways we could make HOPE Court better?
- 6) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about HOPE Court?

Appendix D

HOPE Court Stakeholder Interview Protocol

- 1) What is your role in HOPE Court?
- 2) What has HOPE Court been like for you?
 - a. How has HOPE Court been different from your previous experiences in the dependency court system?
 - b. How did participation in HOPE Court make you feel (for example, happy, hopeful, sad, angry) and why did it make you feel that way?
- 3) What was it like participating in HOPE Court on Zoom, rather than through in-person hearings?
- 4) Have you participated in (pre-Court listening circles, court hearings, IL workshops, Vision Board workshop?) If so, tell me about that experience.
- 5) Did you participate in the restorative practices circles training and/or nonviolent communication trainings? If so, have these influenced or changed your practice? If yes, in what way(s)?
- 6) What has been going well with HOPE Court?
- 7) Has anything been challenging about HOPE Court? If so, what?
- 8) Has HOPE Court impacted your feelings about the value of your work? If so, in what way(s)?
- 9) What suggestions do you have for improvement of HOPE Court?
- 10) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about HOPE Court?