Restorative Practices in Dependency Court (HOPE Court) Cohort 2 - Research Report

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September 2023

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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 Services and Supports (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. The first cohort of HOPE Court was initiated in March 2020. For the second HOPE Court cohort, youth were identified and consented to participate in March 2022, and adults were trained, and circles were implemented beginning in June 2022.

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 partly 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, thus resulting 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 is 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 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 decide 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 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 positive delinquency outcome effects for programs that used victim-offender conferencing and family group conferencing. However, given methodological weaknesses, “the evidence from these conferencing programs is promising, but inconclusive” (p. 36). 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 677,000 cases of substantiated child maltreatment are reported in the U.S. each year (Lawler et al., 2016; Zeanah et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). 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 2021 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, 2023). Also, approximately 20% 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, abandonment, 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 58% of cases in 2021 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, 2023), 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 a 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 (Anda et al. 2006). 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 stressors and 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 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 the 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 toward 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 to independent living. 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 explanatory case study using an embedded single-case design (Yin, 2018), bounded by time (one year) and place (HOPE Court), which employs qualitative and quantitative methods, was used to investigate the implementation of the second cohort of the HOPE Court program. The embedded case study design allows for an in-depth investigation of a single case (HOPE Court) through analysis of subunits (those individuals that experience and contribute to HOPE Court; namely, the youth, Judge, Case manager/social workers, Guardians Ad Litem, Life Coaches, attorneys, and caregivers). "The ability to look at sub-units that are situated within a larger case is powerful when considering that data can be analyzed within the subunits separately (within case analysis), between the different subunits (between case analysis), or across all of the subunits (cross-case analysis). The ability to engage in such rich analysis only serves to better illuminate the case" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 550). The results of the cohort 1 study enabled the development of a conceptual framework and propositions to guide the subsequent explanatory case study of HOPE Court using the same design and case boundaries (Yin, 2018). The explanatory approach was used to examine the implementation of HOPE Court; namely, to

determine how restorative practices are utilized in a dependency court process, how youth and stakeholders experience a dependency court program that utilizes restorative practices, and how restorative practices impact youth and stakeholders in the dependency system. The propositions derived from the analysis of cohort 1 data are as follows:

1. *Youth engagement* will increase due to the frequency of contact, youth-centered approach, and connection with adult team members.
2. *A supportive network of trusted adults* will be created for youth as a result of frequency of contact, collaboration among team members, and restorative practices elements.
3. *Communication and collaboration to meet the needs of youth and facilitate a successful transition in the dependency process* will increase in HOPE court due to frequency and quality of interactions facilitated through the HOPE Court model.

Participants

A purposive sampling approach was used to identify participants representing "subunits" of the single case (HOPE Court). Participants consisted of 12 youth enrolled in HOPE Court and 15 adults (stakeholders) working in or affiliated with HOPE Court. Two of the 12 youth were not available to participate in the individual interview and complete the HOPE Court Participant Survey due to extenuating circumstances. Stakeholders consisted of Child Advocates (Case Managers), Life Coaches, Guardians ad Litem, Attorneys ad litem, and other professionals who work with HOPE Court. It is important to note that two research team members, who also worked in HOPE Court participated in a stakeholder interview.

Youth participants entered HOPE Court between 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.

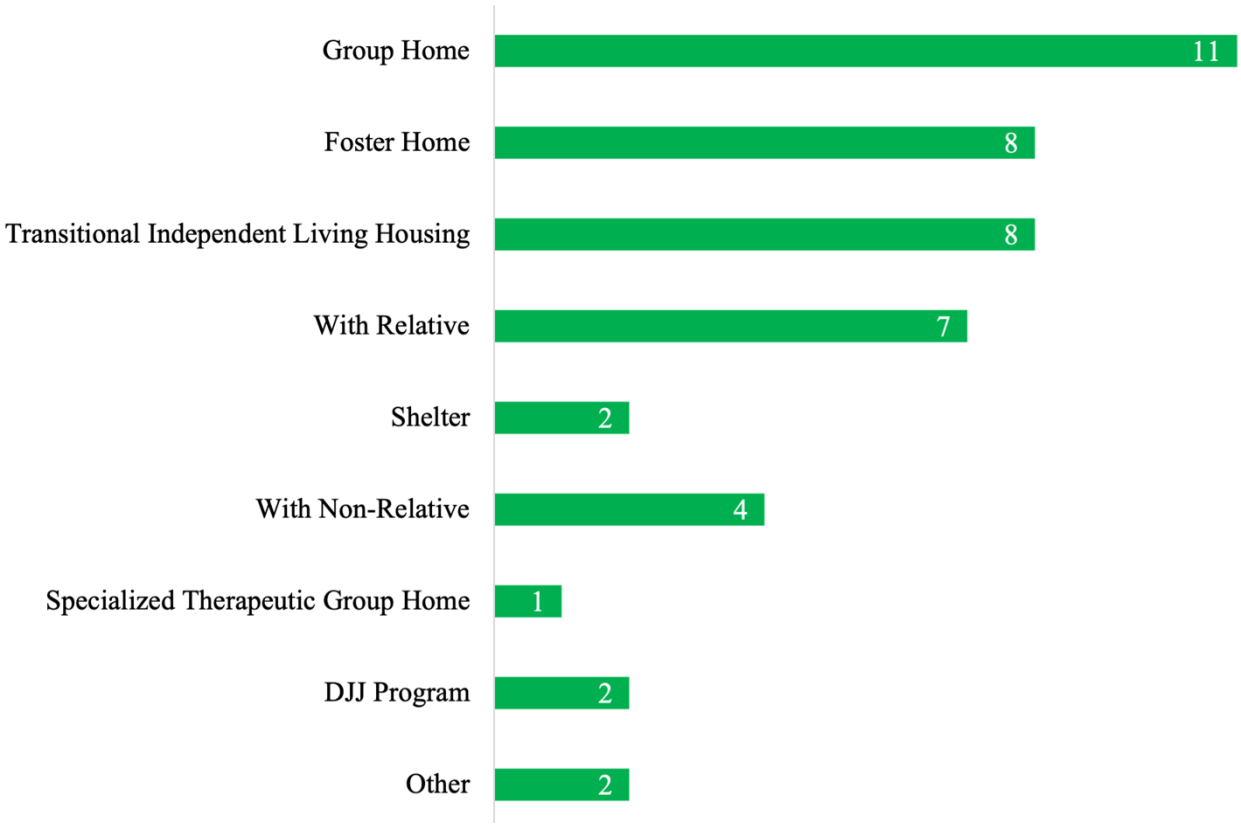
Demographics

Youth participant demographics were collected using a Demographic and History Form, which was completed by the youth's case manager in June 2023. 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 6 years (SD = 5.8). Additionally, the mean number of placements since coming into care was 7.1 (SD = 5.6). Figure 1 shows the frequency and types of placements for all the youth participants since coming into care.

Figure 1

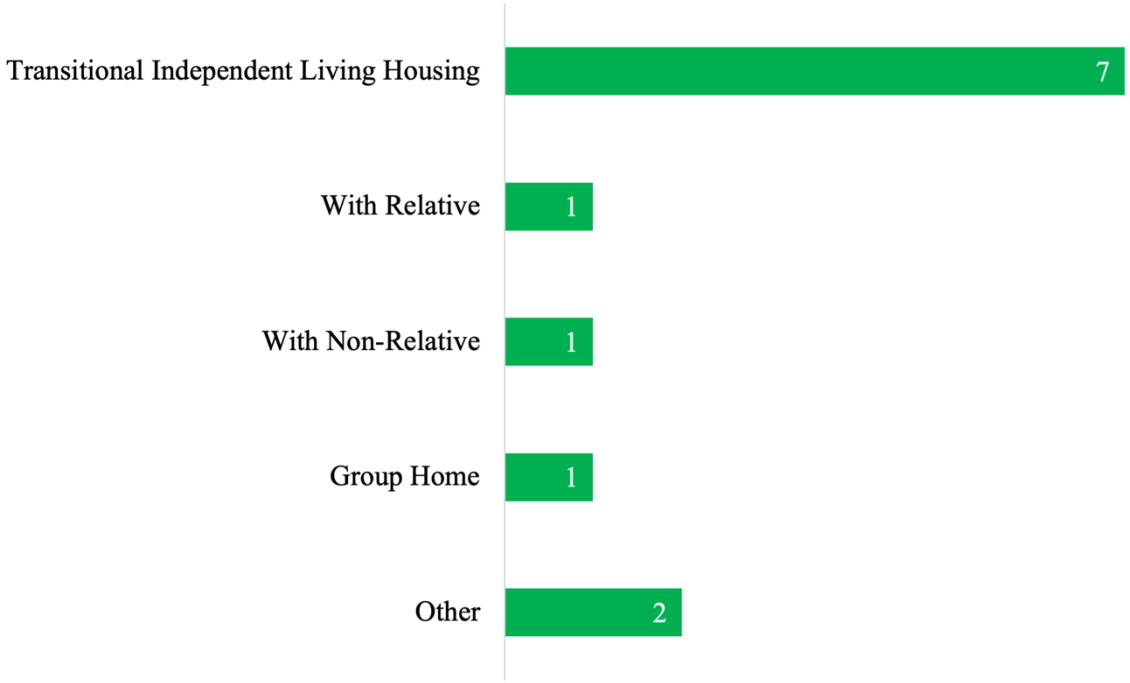
Types of placements since coming into care (n = 12)



Youth participants were reported to be in their current placements for an average of 3 months (see Figure 2 for the types of current placements). Seven out of 12 youth (58%) were reportedly currently placed in transitional independent living housing, 1 participant (8%) was living with a non-relative, 1 participant (8%) was living with a relative, 1 participant (8%) was living in a group home and 2 participants (17%) were in "other" placements.

Figure 2

Youth participants' current placements (n = 12)



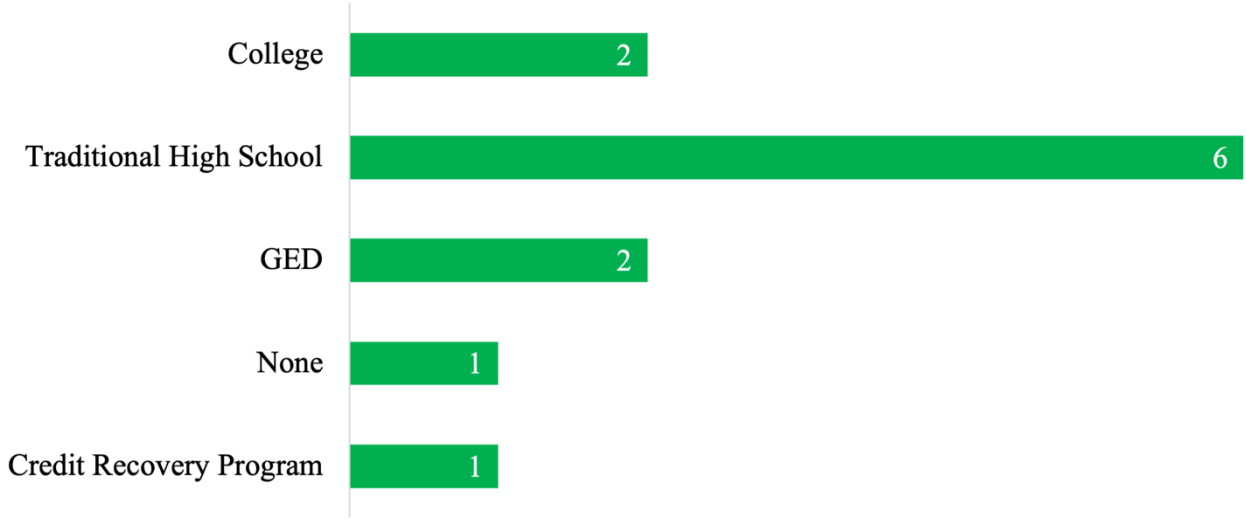
Regarding education, the highest grade completed, and current educational setting are presented below in Figures 3 and 4, respectively.

Figure 3

Highest grade completed (n = 12)

Figure 4

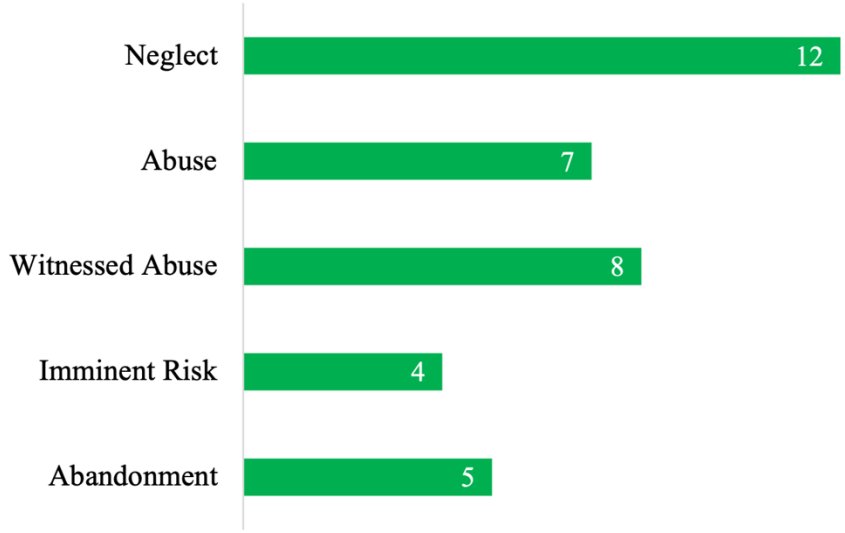
Current educational setting (n = 12)



Experiences prior to coming into care varied by participant and are reported below in Figure 5. All of the participants (100%) were reported to have experienced neglect, 7 participants (58%) experienced abuse, 8 participants (67%) witnessed abuse, 5 participants (42%) experienced abandonment, and 4 youth (33%) were deemed to be at imminent risk of abuse, abandonment or neglect at the time they entered care. Regarding past delinquency, 5 out of 12 (42%) 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, Independent Living Skills Workshop Youth Post-Assessment Survey, Vision Board Workshop Youth Post-Assessment Survey, Vision Board Workshop Stakeholder Post-Assessment Survey, Empathic Assertion Training Survey, Introduction to Restorative Practices Training Survey, Demographic and History form, and Restorative Practices Fidelity Observation Form used in the study of cohort 2 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 research aims.

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).

Restorative Practices Fidelity Observation Form. The Restorative Practices Fidelity Observation Form enables the observer to assess whether restorative practices elements were observed during the HOPE Court activity (i.e., pre-court listening circles, HOPE Court hearings) within the categories of (a) communication and (b) engagement and process (see Appendix E for the Restorative Practices Fidelity Observation Form).

Independent Living Skills Workshop Youth Post-Assessment Survey. The Independent Living Skills Workshop Youth Post-Assessment Survey is administered to HOPE Court youth upon completion of each independent living skills workshop and consists of 5 items: three Likert-scale items that assess how helpful the workshop was with regard to (a) learning something new, (b) learning about a benefit or support available to the youth, and (c) preparing

the youth for transition to independent living; and two open-ended items related to (a) the youth's favorite part of the workshop and (b) how the workshop could be more helpful to the youth (see Appendix F for the Independent Living Skills Workshop Survey).

Vision Board Workshop Youth Post-Assessment Survey. The Vision Board Workshop Youth Post-Assessment Survey is administered to youth upon completion of the Vision Board Workshop and consists of 4 Likert-scale items that assess (a) how much the youth learned about their strengths, (b) how helpful the workshop process was in assisting the youth with learning about benefits that are available, (c) how confident the youth feels that their team will help support them to meet the goals they created, and (d) how hopeful they feel about their future. The survey also contains two open-ended items related to (a) the youth's favorite part of the vision board and (b) other thoughts or comments pertaining to the vision board workshop (see Appendix G for the Vision Board Workshop Youth Post-Assessment Survey).

Vision Board Workshop Stakeholder Post-Assessment Survey. The Vision Board Workshop Stakeholder (Adult) Post-Assessment Survey is administered to stakeholders (adult support team members) upon completion of the Vision Board Workshop and consists of 10 Likert-scale and two open-ended items. Items assess (a) how much stakeholders enjoyed the process, (b) how well the circle provided the youth with understanding and information regarding transitional independent living resources and benefits, (c) how well the circle provided opportunity for a strong youth voice, (d) how well the process supported youth to achieve their goals, (e) how well the circle provided emotional support and connection for the youth, and (f) how important the circle was to an effective transition for the youth. The survey also asks respondents to compare the Vision Board process with the typical Transition to Independent Living (TIL) process on the following indicators: (a) youth engagement, (b) adult support of

youth, (c) youth understanding of resources, (d) connection and encouragement. The survey contains two open-ended items related to (a) the stakeholder's favorite part of the vision board and (b) anything they would change about the circle (see Appendix H for the Vision Board Workshop Stakeholder Post-Assessment Survey).

Empathic Assertion Training Survey. The Empathic Assertion Training Survey is administered to HOPE Court stakeholders upon completion of the Empathic Assertion Training session and consists of 6 Likert-scale items that assess (a) how helpful the training was in meeting their needs for learning and growth, (b) how much they felt inspired and encouraged in their work as a result of the training, (c) how much they think that the information provided will support/help/assist them in their specific work/career, (d) how much they think that the information provided will benefit them in their personal life, (e) how well the training provided them with helpful information regarding communicating with teens who have experienced trauma, and (f) how well did the training provide practical ways to communicate/address conflict (see Appendix I for the Empathic Assertion Training Survey).

Introduction to Restorative Practices Training Assessment. The Introduction to Restorative Practices Training Assessment Survey is administered to HOPE Court stakeholders upon completion of the Introduction to Restorative Practices Training session and consists of 8 Likert-scale items which assess (a) how helpful the training was in meeting their needs for learning and growth, (b) how much they felt inspired and encouraged in their work as a result of the training, (c) how much they think that the information provided will support/help/assist them in their specific work/career, (d) how much they think that the information provided will benefit them in their personal life, (e) how well they understand restorative practice and its theories as a result of the training, (f) how much the training helped them to understand how to be a

restorative practitioner, (g) how well did the training provide them the experience of connection in a circle, and (h) how worthwhile the training was for them (see Appendix J for the Restorative Practices Training Assessment Survey).

Data Collection

Multiple data sources 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, youth and stakeholder training/workshop surveys, observations of pre-court listening circles and court hearings, 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 research team member completed the survey form. A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate the interview and included questions related to participants' experience of the HOPE Court program. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

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 for cohort 2. The interviews took place via Zoom at a time that was convenient for participants. A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate the interview and included questions related to stakeholders' experience of the HOPE Court program. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Observations of HOPE Court proceedings and pre-court listening circles occurred every six weeks via Zoom. A Restorative Practices Fidelity Observation Form was completed, and 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.

Surveys were administered to youth and stakeholders via SurveyMonkey upon completion of each workshop/training to assess satisfaction and effectiveness on specific indicators.

Data Analysis

Survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequency analysis. Items interpreted by the research team to be positive responses (e.g., “Very well” and “well;” “very helpful” and “helpful) were graphed (see Figures 6 to 10) as “positive;” whereas neutral responses (e.g., “somewhat,” “a little”) were graphed as “neutral.” “Negative” responses were

graphed as “negative” and included responses such as: “unhelpful,” “very unhelpful,” “not at all,” “unconfident,” “very unconfident,” and “not at all worthwhile.” To analyze qualitative data, 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). Data were analyzed to determine how restorative practices are utilized in a dependency court process, how youth and stakeholders experience a dependency court program that utilizes restorative practices, and how restorative practices impact youth and stakeholders in the dependency system. Given that the results of the analysis of cohort 1 data enabled the development of a conceptual framework and propositions to guide the subsequent explanatory case study, data analysis for cohort 2 data entailed pattern matching (Yin, 2018). Pattern matching allowed for the comparison of case study findings to initial predictions (propositions). The propositions derived from the analysis of cohort 1 data are as follows:

1. *Youth will be engaged and have a voice in the dependency process* due to the frequency of contact, youth-centered approach, and connection with adult team members

2. *A supportive network of trusted adults* will be created to facilitate transition for youth as a result of frequency of contact, collaboration among team members, and restorative practices elements
3. *Communication and collaboration* will increase to meet the needs of youth and facilitate a successful transition in the dependency process in HOPE court due to frequency and quality of interactions facilitated through the HOPE Court model

Pattern matching was utilized to determine the degree to which the overall pattern of results matched the predicted one (propositions). Quantitative findings were triangulated with qualitative results to support the interpretations.

Results

The results of the data analysis are presented below by (a) workshop/training survey results, (b) results of youth and stakeholder interviews, including whether the overall pattern of results matched the initial propositions, and (c) a summary discussion regarding the integration of restorative practices in HOPE Court, including fidelity to the model, and the effect on youth outcomes.

HOPE Court Stakeholder Survey Results

Empathic Assertion Training Survey Results

The Empathic Assertion Training Survey was administered to HOPE Court stakeholders upon completion of the Empathic Assertion Training session, which was held in-person at the start of HOPE Court cohort 2. Twenty-one stakeholders completed the survey (see Table 1,

Figure 6). The results revealed that almost all of the respondents found the training to be a positive experience with respect to the following areas:

- Met their needs for learning and growth
- Felt inspired and encouraged in work
- Thought that the information provided would support/help/assist in work/career
- Thought that the information provided would be of benefit to their personal life
- Provided helpful information regarding communicating with teens who have experienced trauma
- Provided a practical way to communicate conflict

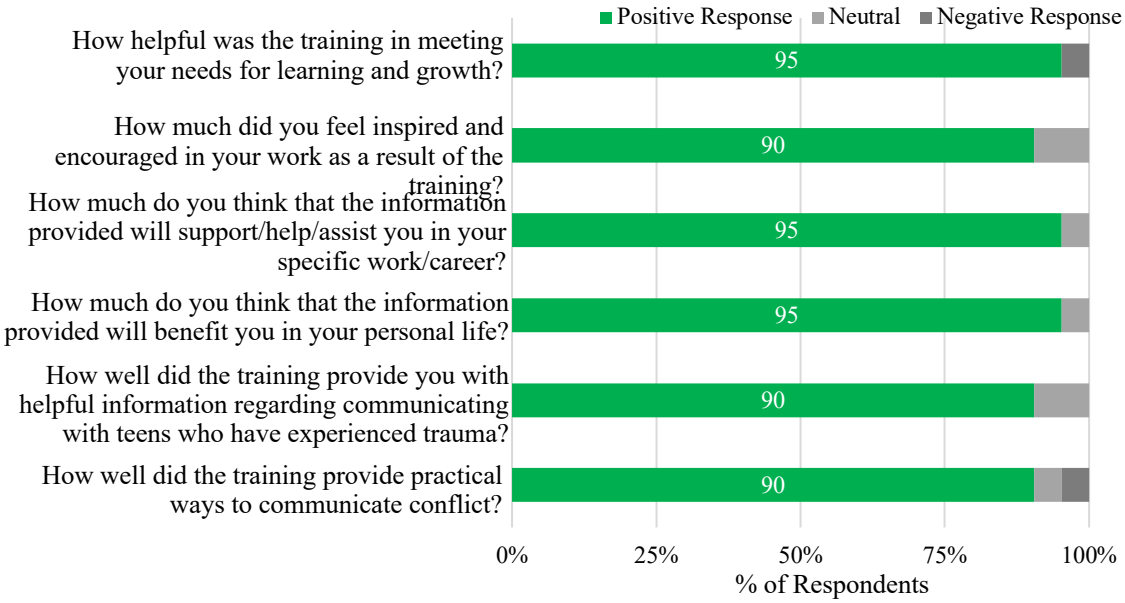
Table 1
Empathic Assertion Training Survey Results

	Very Helpful		Helpful		Unhelpful		Very Unhelpful	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How helpful was the training in meeting your needs for learning and growth?	16	76.2	4	19.0	0	0.0	1	4.8

	A Great Deal		Somewhat		A Little		Not at All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How much did you feel inspired and encouraged in your work as a result of the training?	13	61.9	6	28.6	2	9.5	0	0.0
How much do you think that the information provided will support/help/assist you in your specific work/career?	16	76.2	4	19.0	1	4.8	0	0.0
How much do you think that the information provided will benefit you in your personal life?	12	57.1	8	38.1	1	4.8	0	0.0

	Very Well		Well		Somewhat		Not at All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How well did the training provide you with helpful information regarding communicating with teens who have experienced trauma?	13	61.9	6	28.6	2	9.5	0	0
How well did the training provide practical ways to communicate conflict?	15	71.4	4	19.0	1	4.8	1	4.8

Figure 6
Empathic Assertion Training Survey Results



Introduction to Restorative Practices Training Survey Results

The Introduction to Restorative Practices Training Survey was administered to HOPE Court stakeholders upon completion of the Introduction to Restorative Practices Training session, which was held in-person at the start of HOPE Court cohort 2. Twenty-five stakeholders

completed the survey. Almost all of the respondents had positive responses regarding the following areas related to the training:

- Helpful in meeting needs for learning and growth
- Felt inspired and encouraged in their work/career
- Thought that the information provided will benefit them in their personal life
- Understood restorative practices and its theories
- Understood how to be a restorative practitioner
- Felt that they would be able to use what they learned to be a restorative practitioner
- Considered the training to be worthwhile

Table 2
Introduction to Restorative Practices Training Survey Results

	Very Helpful		Helpful		Unhelpful		Very Unhelpful	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How helpful was the training in meeting your needs for learning and growth?	19	76.0	5	20.0	0	0.0	1	4.0

	A Great Deal		Somewhat		A Little		Not at All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How much did you feel inspired and encouraged in your work as a result of the training?	21	84.0	3	12.0	1	4.0	0	0.0
How much do you think that the information provided will support/help/assist you in your specific work/career?	21	84.0	2	8.0	2	8.0	0	0.0
How much do you think that the information provided will benefit you in your personal life?	19	76.0	5	20.0	1	4.0	0	0.0

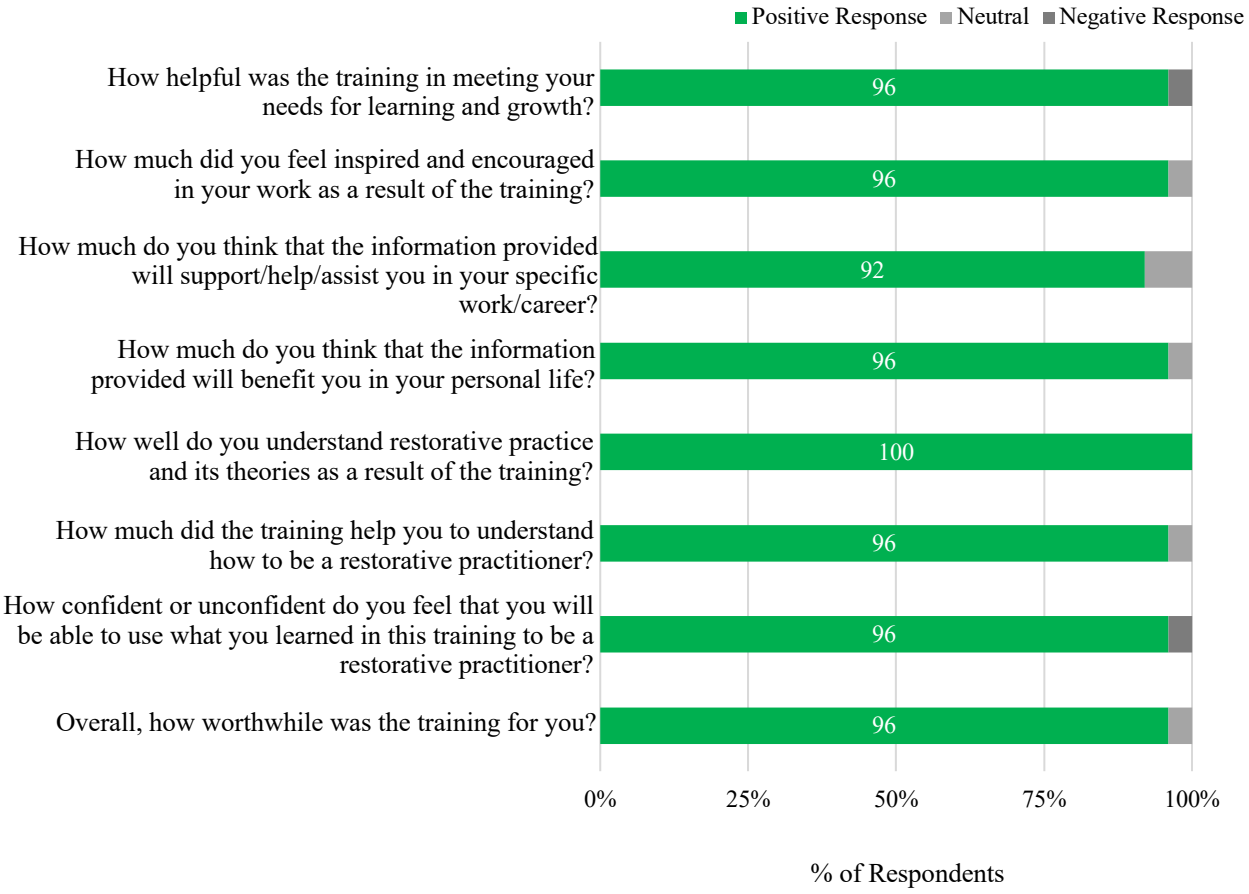
How much did the training help you to understand how to be a restorative practitioner?	15	60.0	9	36.0	1	4.0	0	0.0

	Very Well		Well		Somewhat		Not at All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How well do you understand restorative practice and its theories as a result of the training?	15	62.5	9	37.5	0	0.0	0	0.0

	Very Confident		Confident		Unconfident		Very Unconfident	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How confident or unconfident do you feel that you will be able to use what you learned in this training to be a restorative practitioner.	14	56.0	10	40.0	1	4.0	0	0.0

	Very Worthwhile		Worthwhile		Somewhat Worthwhile		Not at All Worthwhile	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Overall, how worthwhile was the training for you?	18	72.0	6	24.0	1	4.0	0	0.0

Figure 7
Introduction to Restorative Practices Training Survey Results



Vision Board Adult Team Member Survey Results

Vision Board Workshop Surveys were administered to HOPE Court adult team member participants following each Vision Board Workshop. Eleven adult team members completed the survey. Results are presented in aggregate (see Table 3, Figure 8, and summary of open-ended responses). The results indicated that all the respondents had a positive experience with the workshops with respect to the following areas:

- Enjoyed participating in the workshops
- Thought that the circle provided the youth with understanding and information regarding transitional independent living resources and benefits

- Provided an opportunity for strong youth voice
- Supported youth to achieve their goals
- Provided emotional support and connection for the youth
- Considered it to be important for an effective transition for the youth

In addition, all the respondents thought that the vision board process provided a greater opportunity for connection and encouragement for youth compared with the typical TIL process. About 4 out of 5 (82%) thought that the vision board process provided greater benefit regarding the following areas: youth engagement, adult support of youth, and youth understanding of resources.

Table 3
Vision Board Adult Team Member Survey Results

	A Great Deal		Somewhat		A Little		Not at All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How much did you enjoy participating in the vision board circle?	11	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

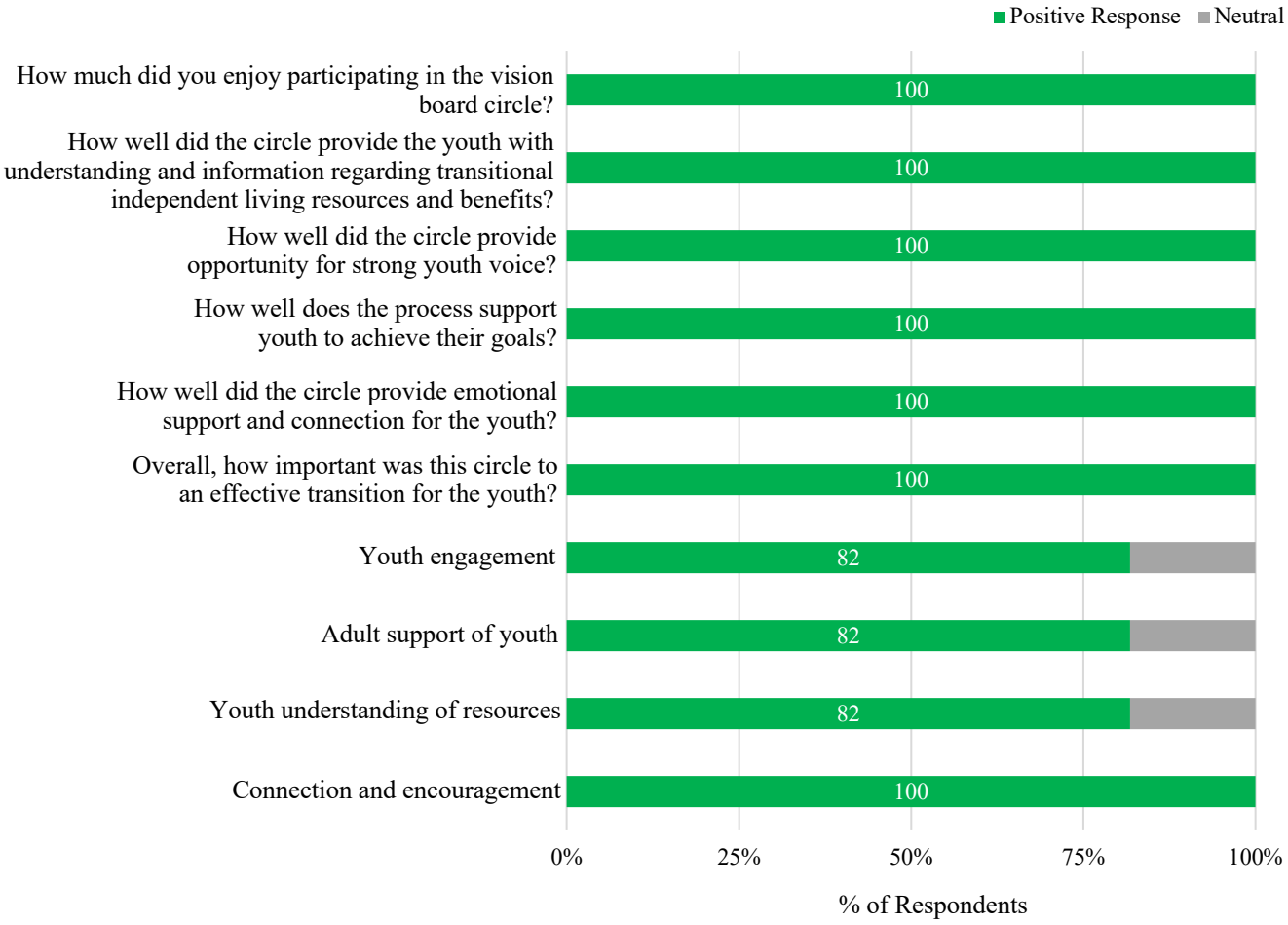
	Very Well		Well		Somewhat		Not at All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How well did the circle provide the youth with understanding and information regarding transitional independent living resources and benefits?	8	72.7	3	27.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
How well did the circle provide opportunity for strong youth voice?	9	81.8	2	18.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
How well does the process support youth to achieve their goals?	8	72.7	3	27.3	0	0.0	0	0.0

How well did the circle provide emotional support and connection for the youth?	10	90.9	1	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0

	Very Important		Important		Unimportant		Very Unimportant	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Overall, how important was this circle to an effective transition for the youth?	11	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Compared to the typical TIL planning process (IL staffing), how much more or less does the vision board process provide opportunity for:	Much More		More		Neither More nor Less		Less		Much Less	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Youth Engagement	7	63.6	2	18.2	2	18.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Adult Support of Youth	7	63.6	2	18.2	2	18.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Youth Understanding of Resources	5	45.5	4	36.4	2	18.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Connection and Encouragement	9	81.8	2	18.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Figure 8
Vision Board Adult Team Member Survey Results



Summary of Open-Ended Responses. Summary statements of the results of open-ended items are indicated below, followed by the related participant responses (in quotes):

The program facilitates cohesive and comprehensive support for the youth through team collaboration.

- "Bringing all [adults] involved in youth lives provides coherent assistance and support."
- "Having all adult support teams participate with the youth and providing input as far as adulting."

The circle process offers clarity, empowerment, and reinforcement for the youth.

- “Giving the youth the opportunity to open and close their circle allows them to see the process written out as it is being discussed.”
- “Discussing strengths and closure with what we learned about the youth during the circle. Although most of us did not learn anything new, it was a very supportive way to leave her with encouragement and hearing words of affirmation.”

Personalized advice, affirmations, and positive feedback are emphasized and are seen as beneficial.

- “Everyone gave individual advice and encouragement to the youth.”
- “[Favorite part] Hearing everyone's opinion and motivation for the youth once he visually sees his vision board.”
- “Team members share positive strengths.”
- “The encouraging words [helps a lot].”

The program provides detailed knowledge on benefits and resources available for the youth.

- “My favorite part was going over the benefits for the Youth, it's very detailed from the housing, medical and monetary benefits.”
- “[Favorite part] Learning myself about the resources available for youths. This was my first Hope Court and first time serving as a GAL.”

The following open-ended item response related to youth engagement and accountability was also included; however, the context/meaning or intent of the statement is unclear.

- “I like that it is face-to-face. This method offers more opportunity for engagement. I think the youth is more accountable if they are looking at a team in person. The staffings held via Zoom provide the same information. However, it has been my experience that youth are not nearly as engaged.”

HOPE Court Youth Survey Results

Independent Living Workshops Survey Results

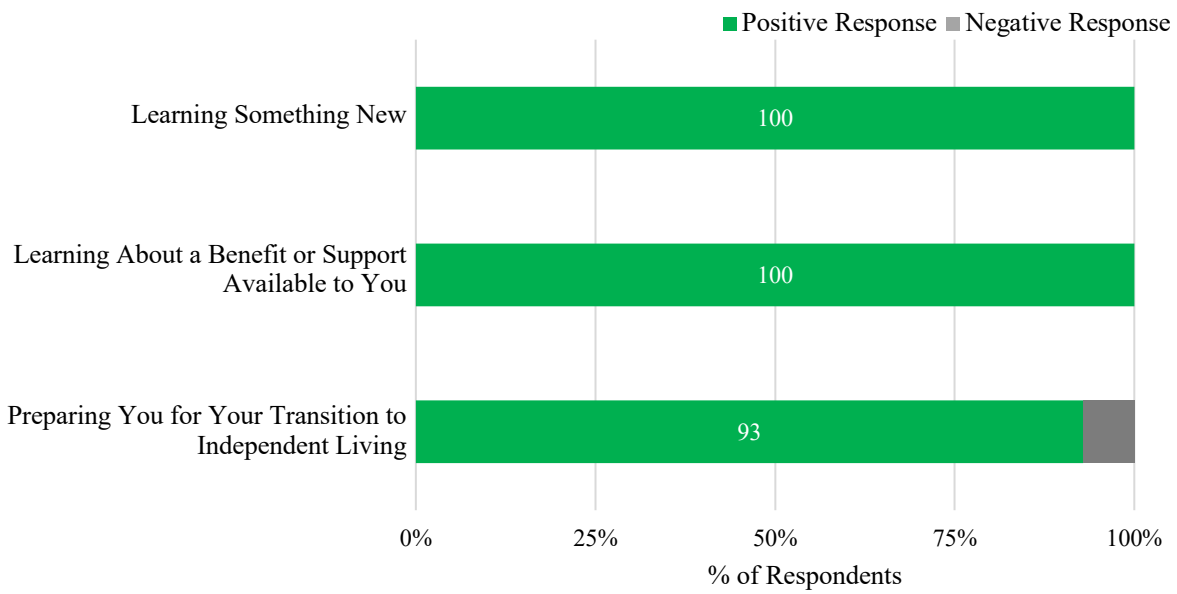
Independent Living Skills Workshop Surveys were administered to HOPE Court youth participants following each Independent Living Skills Workshop (7 total) from September 2022 to May 2023. Survey results are presented in aggregate (see Table 4, Figure 9, and summary of open-ended responses). Nearly all the participants indicated the following about workshops:

- They prepared participants for their transition to independent living
- Participants learned about a benefit or support available to them
- Participants learned something new

Table 4
Independent Living Workshops Survey Results

	Very Helpful		Helpful		Unhelpful		Very Unhelpful	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Learning Something New	12	85.7	2	14.3	0	0	0	0.0
Learning About a Benefit or Support Available to You	8	57.1	6	42.9	0	0	0	0.0
Preparing You for Your Transition to Independent Living	10	71.4	3	21.4	1	7.1	0	0.0

Figure 9
Independent Living Workshops Survey Results



Independent Living Skills Workshop Wellness Survey Open-Ended Reponses

Summary. Summary statements of the results of open-ended items are indicated below, followed by the related participant responses (in quotes):

The workshop provided a safe space for participants to express their feelings and emotions.

- "[Favorite part] Was expressing how we felt."

The workshop touched on sensitive and important topics like mental health.

- "[Learning] How people deal with suicide."

Independent Living Skills Workshop Survey Open-Ended Reponses Summary.

Summary statements of the results of open-ended items are indicated below, followed by the related participant responses (in quotes):

The cooking activities were especially valued by participants who lacked cooking skills.

- "[Favorite part] The cooking"
- "[Favorite part] The cooking because I do not know how to cook"

Participants found value in various aspects of the workshop.

- “[Favorite part] The Yoga”
- “[Favorite part] Looking at the budget and seeing the possible cost of the things.”
- “[Favorite part] Learning about the different types of support that is available to me.”

The workshop provided comprehensive information that was well-received.

- “[Favorite part] Honestly, I just appreciated all the information I was provided with.”

Independent Living Skills Workshop Finance Survey Open-Ended Reponses Summary. Summary statements of the results of open-ended items are indicated below, followed by the related participant responses (in quotes):

The workshop was informative, and participants appreciated the interaction.

- “I loved the fact I was able to talk with them and they were very informative.”

The workshop met or exceeded participants' expectations.

- “It’s perfect for me.”

Independent Living Skills Workshop Yoga and Art Survey Open-Ended Responses Summary. Summary statements of the results of open-ended items are indicated below, followed by the related participant responses (in quotes):

The workshop created an environment where participants could openly discuss their feelings.

- “[Favorite part] Passing around the teddy bear and saying how we feel.”
- “[Favorite part] Talking about fears.”

Participants found the workshop adequately beneficial.

- When asked how the workshop could be more helpful, one participant indicated, “It’s already helpful enough.”

Vision Board Youth Survey Results

Vision Board Workshop Surveys were administered to HOPE Court youth participants following each Vision Board Workshop. Seven youth completed the survey. Results are presented in aggregate (see Table 5, Figure 10, and summary of open-ended responses). All youth participants indicated that the vision board workshops resulted in them experiencing the following:

- Felt more hopeful about the future
- Felt more confident that their team would help support them in meeting the goals the youth created
- Helped them learn more about the benefits that were available to them
- Learned a substantial amount about their strengths

Table 5
Vision Board Youth Survey Results

	Very Much		Quite a Bit		Very Little		Nothing at All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How much did you learn about your strengths today?	6	85.7	1	14.3	0	0.0	0	0.0

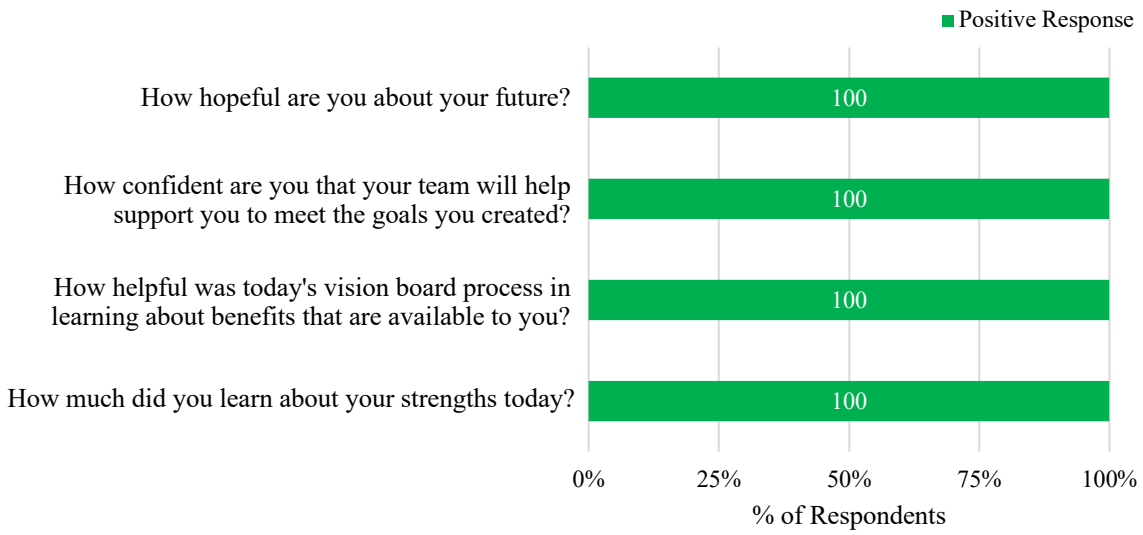
	Very Helpful		Helpful		Unhelpful		Very Unhelpful	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How helpful was today's vision board process in learning about benefits that are available to you?	7	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

	Very Confident	Confident	Unconfident	Very Unconfident

	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How confident are you that your team will help support you to meet the goals you created?	6	85.7	1	14.3	0	0.0	0	0.0

	Very Hopeful		Hopeful		Unhopeful		Very Unhopeful	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How hopeful are you about your future?	5	71.4	2	28.6	0	0.0	0	0.0

Figure 10
Vision Board Youth Survey Results



Vision Board Workshop Youth Survey Open-Ended Responses Summary. Summary statements of the results of open-ended items are indicated below, followed by the related participant responses (in quotes):

The Vision Board Workshop was informative and provided clarity about the future.

- "I liked all of it. I feel it was very informative and somewhat eases my nerves about my future."

- "My favorite part of the vision board was where I learned about all the benefits that are available to me. I previously did not know some of these benefits existed."
- "I really enjoyed making the vision board. I had my thoughts on my future but being able to see everything written down and available for me is very helpful."

The team supporting the youth is highly valued and appreciated.

- "My team is amazing"
- "My team is great!"
- "Best team ever"

The workshop offers assistance in multiple areas and has positive interactions.

- "I feel helped"
- "Housing"
- "My future career"
- "Everything"
- "[Positive] Interactions"

Youth and Stakeholder Interviews

The results of the analysis of youth and stakeholder interviews are organized by a discussion of each proposition derived from the analysis of cohort 1 data. The propositions used to guide the analysis are presented below:

1. *Youth will be engaged and have a voice in the dependency process* due to the frequency of contact, youth-centered approach, and connection with adult team members
2. *A supportive network of trusted adults* will be created to facilitate transition for youth as a result of frequency of contact, collaboration among team members, and restorative practices elements

3. *Communication and collaboration* will increase to meet the needs of youth and facilitate a successful transition in the dependency process in HOPE court due to frequency and quality of interactions facilitated through the HOPE Court model

The discussion of each proposition is organized as follows: (a) youth are engaged and have a voice in the dependency process (youth-centered approach), (b) youth have a reliable support network of trusted adults in their transition to adulthood, and (c) youth needs are better met through frequent, high-quality communication and collaboration. As was evident in the results of cohort 1 stakeholder and youth interviews, HOPE Court represents a substantial shift from typical dependency court processes and proceedings. Discussion of the differences between HOPE Court and typical dependency court as experienced by youth and stakeholders is threaded throughout the presentation of each proposition.

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

Analysis of cohort 2 interview data supported the proposition that youth will be engaged and have a voice in the dependency process due to the frequency of contact, youth-centered approach, and connection with adult team members. Youth and stakeholders described HOPE Court as a youth-centered process, which prioritizes youth voice and engagement. Stakeholders cited (a) the higher frequency of court hearings and contact with the Judge and adult support team members, (b) the centering of the youth in hearings/activities within HOPE Court, (c) creating a more comfortable, informal, non-judgmental, and "fun" judicial environment, (d) demonstration of empathy and caring for the youths' well-being, and the trust and connection developed with team members over time as contributing to youth

engagement and voice. When asked to describe how HOPE Court differs from traditional dependency court, one stakeholder noted, “

> …it's more frequent and the youth are more empowered. They have more voice. They can explain. Yeah, they can explain how they're feeling without feeling like they're being judged, or no one is listening, or they're inadequate to express how they feel. So, it's definitely more support, and I feel like the youth have more of a voice with HOPE court.

Stakeholder and youth participants reported favorable impressions of the HOPE Court hearings when compared to 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 humanize the judge and adult team members and make the youth and adult team members feel more comfortable. As noted in observations of court hearings, examples of ice breaker questions included, “If you could change places with a character from your favorite holiday movie, who would it be?” and “Would you rather be able to breathe under water or walk on water?” The youth is given the option to go first or last, and all HOPE Court team members, including the judge, answer the question. For several of the youth the initial question was reported to be their favorite part of HOPE Court. Youth are centered in the HOPE Court hearing and given the chance to speak first, followed by the supportive professionals who are then offered the chance to ask questions and comment. As was found with cohort 1, 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 stated,

> The court hearings are enjoyable. Honestly, we start with like the fun question, go around. The kids love it. They just love it. The judge has a great energy. And everyone answers questions. So, I feel like it creates, I think that it creates like some trust and some comfort amongst the group. And some comfort in a space that traditionally wouldn't be comfortable…It creates a situation where, like you want to go to court. Just unusual. And you know, I think that makes it what it was meant to be, which is, you know, a space to have, like, you know that support for the kids to like, hear what's going on, help them on their journey, like it creates a nice space of trust and effectiveness.

Youth participants also spoke to feeling "comfortable" in the HOPE Court setting, and appreciated the opportunity to be heard, participate in their own case, and ask questions of the Judge and adult team members, which represented a difference for them when compared to typical dependency court. One youth noted,

> …most court, like regular court, it's like boring and like they speak so intellectually like it's hard to understand and they don't really care to explain it…um you guys like explain it more, you guys really focus on what I think than regular court.

Youth survey results also reflected engagement with the HOPE Court process. All ten of the youth participants (100%) 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 B for HOPE Court Participant Survey results).

Across HOPE Court activities (pre-court listening circles, hearings, vision board workshop), youth are centered in the process and their voice is prioritized in the dialogue regarding the youth's status and needs. The initial circle go-around (i.e., feelings check-in or ice-breaker question) was also utilized in pre-court listening circles to center the youth and improve connection and comfortability between the youth and adult team members and among stakeholders, as well. Youth were often given the option to create their own circle go-around question (ice-breaker) or to do a "feelings check-in." One stakeholder noted,

> So, I think being youth centered in that like we ask questions directly to the youth has made a significant difference in them opening up. There was even one observer from the outside who said, like, 'I've been a part of your circles. I've been a part of your vision boards, and I see that your kids, like they tell you everything' and to me that's a testament on the format, the model being youth-centered. But also, I think those, the icebreaker questions that we do that allow them to see even us adults as like, you know, silly, regular human people. And see how much commonality we have with them also makes a safe space for them to open up and really share. You know what, what they're going through, and us coming together collaboratively to see how we can support them.

Youth indicated that HOPE Court helped them to feel supported, "welcomed," "loved" and "safe," and they particularly valued being able to speak without fear of being judged. When asked to describe a favorite part of HOPE Court, one youth stated,

> Um the people and the Zoom meetings. Everybody made me feel very loved and welcome. I would say that would be the best time of my life I have to say, if I could say anything about being in foster care having HOPE Court circles was the best time

> and I loved it. It was the people mainly which made it as special as it was and um the best part was being able to talk about how I feel and be able to have my feelings heard and validated and be able to say 'you know what it's ok to feel that way, we don't judge you, we don't bash you. We don't want to fight with you, it's OK and we're going to do what we can to fix it.'

Most of the youth interviewed also indicated that participation in HOPE Court reduced their "stress," eased their worry, and/or had a "calming" effect. Youth participants attributed this to factors such as, being able to express their feelings and concerns, the support and connection with adult team members, and gaining a better understanding of steps they needed to take in their transition to adulthood (i.e., through activities such as the Virtual Vision Board independent living planning activity). One youth participant stated, "HOPE Court's basically to me, HOPE Court was basically like the place you can go to when you need to de-stress, get everything off your shoulders, if there's any concerns you might have, HOPE Court's where I would take them."

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

Results of the analysis of cohort 2 youth and stakeholder interview data, and youth survey results supported the proposition that within HOPE Court a supportive network of trusted adults will be created to facilitate transition for youth as a result of frequency of contact, collaboration among team members, and restorative practices elements. Consistent with the results of the analysis of cohort 1 interview data, interviews with both youth and stakeholders in cohort 2 revealed that in HOPE Court, youth have a reliable support network of trusted adults in their transition to adulthood. The professionals involved with each youth represent

an expanded team, compared to what would be seen in typical dependency court. The youth's HOPE Court team comprises the case manager (Child Advocate), Guardian ad litem, Attorney ad litem, Judge, foster parent (if applicable) and program administrators: HOPE Court Director and Assistant Director. Their team also includes a mentor or life coach, who can provide additional guidance through the transition to independent living. Given the expanded team, there are increased opportunities for youth to build connections with adults in the child welfare system prior to aging out. One stakeholder noted,

> I think, with Hope Court…most of these kids, as they turn 18, don't feel like they have one trusted adult, they feel like they have, like 4 or 5 trusted adults. So, they feel a lot more supported which then translates to better outcomes because they don't feel like they're sort of isolated and alone. They feel like they are part of a community that wants to see them, you know, thrive.

As was noted with cohort 1, both youth and stakeholders in cohort 2 pointed to the "team" as an important aspect of HOPE Court, with all professionals meeting frequently, and communicating and collaborating effectively to ensure the youth's needs are met and they are prepared to transition to adulthood successfully. When asked what contributes to youth feeling supported in the HOPE Court process, one stakeholder reported,

> …the frequency, just the constant involvement of everyone and everyone, just reassuring them that you know this is your support team. We're here for you if you want to schedule another circle whenever you want. Just, you know, just let us know.

Adult team members are trained in nonviolent communication and restorative practices and in turn, utilize empathy and affective language to communicate and connect with youth. Communication and connection between youth and team members, as

well as among team members, was evident across youth and stakeholder interviews. Youth reported their team members cared for their well-being, were supportive, and valued their input, feelings and concerns. Youth feelings of comfortability, connection and reliance on team members was apparent within interviews. One youth participant likened their HOPE Court team to "family" and stated,

> Um, they're like my family...like they're like my aunties, uncles, like I love them all. I looked at it like they help me in certain situations and like we've built a relationship that's so honest that I don't have to be afraid to tell them anything and that I can tell them anything that I need to and I don't have to be scared about being judged or being ridiculed for it.

Similarly, one youth participant gave the following response when asked about the relationships developed with the adult HOPE Court team members:

> Pretty much everyone on my team, you know, I love them. You know, they're always so supportive. They're always people that I can go to when there's anything wrong. Or you know when I just need to, even if it's just to get something off my chest. You know they're always the people I can turn to, my life coach, my judge, my CA [case manager] supervisor, all of them.

Youth participants characterized their HOPE Court teams as caring, supportive, helpful, and reliable. Youth respondents emphasized that team members were there when they needed them and expressed confidence that any issues would be addressed, even if team members did not have immediate answers. One youth participant stated,

> Hope court has pretty much been like a group of people I know has my back whenever I'm in a situation where I need help. They've always been there for me when I needed

> them and it's just nice knowing that even if you don't know all the answers, you have someone there to help you out through this journey of adulthood.

Stakeholders also reported that youth continued to maintain connections with adult support team members and request circles after turning 18. This suggests that the feelings of connection extend beyond what they may experience solely within the scope of HOPE Court activities, and they are viewing their HOPE Court team members as a support network of trusted adults they can continue to turn to even after they have "aged out" of the system. One stakeholder noted,

> It didn't end after she was 18, like my, so she's already 18. So, my role with her has ended, but I've as I've kept up with her like, she has continued to say that these like hearings and stuff, have like continued to help her focus on how she can flourish post-foster life and I think yeah, that's really, that's really hopeful.

On the HOPE Court Participant Survey all of the youth participants (100%) answered "yes" to the following items: (5) I can talk to someone from my HOPE Court team if I feel stressed, sad, or angry; 6) Someone from my HOPE Court team will help me if I'm sick or hurt; (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. These results provide further evidence that youth feel supported by their HOPE Court teams through the transition to independent living process.

Meeting Youth Needs through Frequent, High-Quality Communication and Collaboration

Results of the analysis of cohort 2 youth and stakeholder interview data supported the proposition that communication and collaboration will increase to meet the needs of youth and facilitate a successful transition in the dependency process in HOPE court due to frequency and quality of interactions facilitated through the HOPE Court model. Consistent with the results of analysis of cohort 1 interview data, interviews with both youth and stakeholders in cohort 2 revealed that the frequency and quality of interactions/communication as well as a collaborative approach were reported by stakeholders and youth to be key positive aspects of HOPE Court and contributed to successful transition. As noted in the cohort 1 research report, 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, with the youth, and address any issues as they arise utilizing empathy and non-violent communication. The ability to communicate and collaborate on a regular and relatively frequent basis, when compared to typical dependency court, was cited by stakeholders as a factor which helped them to more effectively perform their jobs and ensure youth needs are met. The (a) "rapport," (b) shared responsibility of

team members, and (c) organization of the process were also identified as important aspects contributing to positive outcomes. One stakeholder stated,

> The difference that I see with my youth that are in HOPE court and my youth that are not in Hope Court. You know I have an ongoing communication and a rapport with the other professionals that they have on their team as opposed to my other youth. It may be hard to get in contact with their advocate, or hard to get in contact with a therapist, or, you know, not get called back so and that aspect, it's been amazing.

The frequency of meetings and follow up of program administrators with meeting outcomes and assigned tasks also was reported to contribute to increased accountability. One stakeholder noted that in typical dependency court,

> …it's hard, harder to keep up with the follow through, whereas in Hope Court it's, it's just so nice, because [program administrators] will lay it all out in an email. You know, 1, 2, 3, 4. You know what I mean. And you know, and that, and that way the accountability is, is there.

Consistent with findings from cohort 1, 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. When asked about experiences with pre-court listening circles, one youth participant stated,

> …all of them I feel heard… I'm just like able to see what's to come. I've never felt like I don't know what's coming next with my pre-court HOPE circles, like we talk about, and I know what to expect for right now and for further on in my next court circle.

As was noted for cohort 1, 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. Emphasis was placed on the frequency of contact, and communication/rapport among team members in contributing to "getting things done." Stakeholders noted that in typical dependency court, tasks may "fall through the cracks" resulting in unmet needs for the youth. When asked about the pre-court listening circles, one stakeholder noted,

> …Those kind of help for keeping, kind of keeping the kids on track or so we don't have needs that fall through the cracks sometimes. So those, the circles are helpful, and there's help for the kid, because they get to speak their mind pretty much. The kids kind of run the circle…It's a good thing to hear, to hear certain things that might be their point of view if they're comfortable enough to say it in front of the circle. But so far most of them have been because they've been developing the rapport of everybody in, in HOPE Court. They're not afraid to say, 'hey this is what I need.'

Moreover, addressing challenges or conflicts in the pre-court listening circles and consistently working with the youth between hearings allowed for a "smoother," more productive and positive experience in the court hearing. In typical dependency court, it was noted that issues or concerns are typically brought to the hearing, necessitating "off the cuff" trouble shooting in court. As was noted with cohort 1, stakeholders noted that HOPE Court represents a contrast to the "adversarial model" typically seen in dependency court. HOPE Court focuses primarily on employing relationship and community building to connect the youth with a team of trusted adults, who are all continuously working between and within court hearings toward the same goal of a successful transition to adulthood for the youth. Another stakeholder noted that with HOPE Court,

> Everyone is on one page with each other, and we're walking into court with a plan. Like everyone has that one plan and that one goal that we need to get accomplished. And you

> know the kids are included in that plan, no one is blind-sided in court, and it's more, the court hearings are a little bit more therapeutic and inclusive rather than you know, defensive or aggressive in a way.

Summary of Integration of Restorative Practices in HOPE Court

As indicated previously, HOPE Court is grounded in a restorative practices approach. Through the study's interviews and observations, restorative practices were evident across interventions and activities within HOPE Court. Youth in HOPE Court are provided with an expanded team, which includes a mentor or life coach, and frequent contact beginning approximately 1 year prior to the youth's 18th birthday. Court hearings are 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 all but one of the hearings were all held on Zoom, a "talking piece" (symbolic object held by the person talking, which ensures only one person talks at a time) could not be utilized; however, as was noted with cohort 1, 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, connected, safe, and valued, and that their voices were heard. One stakeholder noted,

> I prefer HOPE court, especially for the older teenagers. When they are close to aging out most of them are very like nervous about aging out. It's a big transition, and I feel that like for the kids that aren't in HOPE Court there's kind of just like a checklist of what they have to go over. They kind of talk at the kids and kind of just cross everything off of their list and you know those kids age out but a lot of times they're very nervous. They're very scared. And so, I like that Hope Court has a lot of hearings prior to them, turning 18. And it has a really nice, I guess, circle support. Everything is kind of structured around the kid, and I think that it helps ease them into adulthood better than is traditionally done with most kids who age out in care… for sure the frequency helps a lot. It's also good how like we have circles like a week or a week or 2 before the court hearing so we can have that kind of, go over all of the concerns the child or the team has before we go to court. But even the way the court is structured, it's structured in a very non-adversarial way. It's, it's structured as a ‘I'm a judge. Here's the team. How can we help you?’ So I think it's just even structured better. A lot of times these kids have had a lot of court interactions that haven't been positive. And so, I think that HOPE Court is a positive experience for them, and it does make them feel like they are supported and like, they have people that they can rely on.

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."

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 collectively problem-solve concerns and ensure the youth's needs are met and that 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 (e.g., complete a SNAP application, locate a therapist, address issues with a placement), 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 (IL) workshops. IL workshops for the second cohort took place via Zoom with 2 in-person workshops. As was seen with cohort 1, attendance at the independent living workshops was variable for cohort 2. Eleven out of 12 youth (92%)

attended at least one workshop. Compared to other HOPE Court activities, it was reportedly difficult to achieve consistent attendance at Independent Living Workshops.

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, 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 “with the vision board, they're included [youth], their voices, their wants, their needs. Everything is on there. We're able to listen to them. It's not time to, where they're rushing to get something across and I just feel the vision board, it needs to be extended to more kids versus just HOPE Court.” Another stakeholder indicated,

> We have found that whether it is a youth who was typically quieter or a youth who is very talkative either way it ends up being this process where the users are very engaged. And it's a really nice way to do transitional, independent living, planning with our youth instead of ‘to them’ instead of ‘for them,’ which is the tenants of what it, being restorative, is all about because it shares all of this amazing information that our kids need to know, all these resources that they need to know in order to, you know, age out successfully. It does it in such a way that they’re uplifted...the kids are super engaged.

Suggested areas for the improvement of HOPE Court that were indicated by two or more stakeholders/youth during the interviews included the following: (a) Make HOPE Court available to more youth in the dependency system; (b) Incorporate more in-person contact opportunities (e.g., in-person circles or hearings every 3 to 6 months; consider holding some HOPE Court activities on "neutral ground," such as a community center or park); and (c) Focus more so on youth accountability so that they take more responsibility for their actions. A challenge was also noted by stakeholders concerning the turnover of child welfare personnel within the HOPE Court setting, given the focus on relationship building. Further, a need was identified to continue non-violent communication training for adults in HOPE Court to ensure all adult team members appropriately use the same approach.

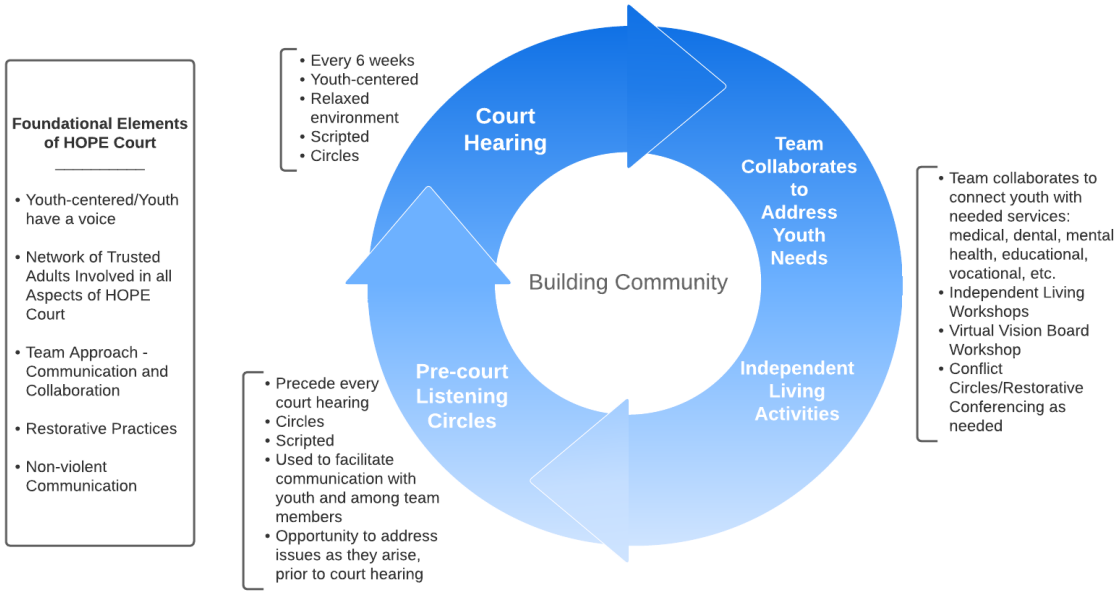
The HOPE Court conceptual model (see Figure 11) was initially developed as a result of the exploratory case study of HOPE Court cohort 1, and further supported and slightly modified as a result of the current study. Specifically, the following foundational element was added: A team approach which emphasizes communication, collaboration, and follow-through to meet the needs of the youth. Thus, infused throughout the HOPE Court process are the foundational elements, that 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. A team approach which emphasizes communication, collaboration, and follow-through to meet the needs of the youth

4. Integration of restorative practices throughout all activities and interventions; and

5. Training of adult team members in restorative practices and utilization of non-violent communication.

Figure 11
HOPE Court Model



Fidelity to Restorative Practices

Observations were conducted across 10 pre-court listening circles and 7 HOPE Court hearings, and a Restorative Practices Fidelity observation tool was completed for each activity to gauge fidelity to restorative practices elements within the categories of (a) communication, and (b) engagement and process (see Appendix E for the Restorative Practices Fidelity Observation Form). Observations were typically conducted for approximately 90 to 120 minutes per observation and encompassed multiple youth included on the docket or scheduled for pre-court circles. One form was completed per

90-120-minute observation. Across observations, all restorative practices elements were observed within each 90-120-minute observation period; however, not all elements were observed for each individual youth hearing/circle. Notably, restorative practices elements were more frequently observed within each individual youth hearing/circle for engagement and process (respectful, collaborative approach to problem solving and decision making, youth voice is centered in process, participation, high expectations/high standards established for the youth, accountability, high level of support provided to the youth, and fair process), when compared to elements aligning to communication (i.e., empathy, affective language utilized). A script is used to guide circles and affective statements and empathy are not always used since they are not always needed for each youth. Examples of empathic communication observed within HOPE Court activities included, "I'm hearing there's a lot to do and you're feeling a little anxious," "I'm guessing that's frustrating for you…," "I'm guessing that doesn't feel very good," and "I heard you were a little overwhelmed with college applications. How is that going?" Examples of affective language included the following, "I'm so proud of your graduation...I'm excited to celebrate you next week!" "I'm glad things are so good with you," "I'm proud of you [for taking driving test]…you are doing the best you can and a lot has come your way..."

HOPE Court Youth Outcomes

Regarding 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 September 1, 2023, 9 participants (75%) remained in EFC, or transferred to the PESS program, and 3

participants (25%) were terminated from EFC (see Figure 12 for the number of HOPE Court youth participants remaining in EFC or PESS, or terminated as of September 1, 2023). Additionally, all youth (100%) who remained in EFC continued to voluntarily participate in pre-court circles and/or court hearings. One youth who transferred to the PESS program continued to voluntarily request circles with the HOPE Court team. Although the sample size is small (n = 12), these results suggest the program is meeting its goal of keeping the youth engaged in EFC or PESS, which is further supported by similar outcomes found in the cohort 1 study. For the youth participants of cohort 1 of HOPE Court, 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.

Figure 12

Number of HOPE Court cohort 2 youth participants remaining in EFC or PESS or terminated as of September 1, 2023

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 cohort 2 youth demonstrated a much higher

participation rate (75%). 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 (25%) who were terminated from EFC, the time in EFC prior to termination was 9 months, 8 months, and 4 months. All HOPE Court youth (100%) evidenced participation rates exceeding two months. One youth who was terminated from EFC continued to receive aftercare funds and is working toward the PESS program. For all youth in HOPE Court remaining in EFC or PESS, as of September 1, 2023, the mean time in EFC was 7 months (SD = 3.11) 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 represented an improvement on this indicator. Finally, analysis of FSFN 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 = 12), limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Discussion

An explanatory case study was conducted of the second cohort of HOPE Court, a dependency court program in Broward County that 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 support for the following propositions that were derived from the analysis of cohort 1: (a) youth will be engaged and have a voice in the dependency process due to the frequency of contact, youth-centered approach, and connection with adult team members; (b) within HOPE Court a supportive network of trusted adults will be created to facilitate transition for youth as a result of frequency of contact, collaboration among team members, and restorative practices elements; and (c) communication and collaboration will increase to meet the needs of youth and facilitate a successful transition in the dependency process in HOPE court due to frequency and quality of interactions facilitated through the HOPE Court model. Implementation of cohort 2 was in alignment with the HOPE Court model (developed as a result of the exploratory case study conducted with cohort 1; see Figure 11), which represents the foundational elements, cycle of activities, and the infusion of restorative practices into the dependency court process. A slight modification was made to the model as a result of analysis of cohort 2 data; namely, "a team approach which emphasizes communication, collaboration and follow-through to meet the needs of the youth," was incorporated as a foundational element of HOPE Court. Restorative practices were found to be implemented across HOPE Court hearings and pre-court listening circles with fidelity as observed using the Restorative Practices Fidelity Observation Form.

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. This finding was also evident in the evaluation of cohort 1. 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, results of the analysis of cohort 1 data suggested 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. Similarly, analysis of cohort 2 data revealed that youth were engaged and had a voice in the dependency process, which was attributed to the frequency of contact, youth-centered approach, and connection developed and fostered with adult team members over time. Youth were centered in all HOPE Court activities and youth voice was prioritized in discussions related to the youth's status/case. Youth and stakeholders also reported strong connections with adult HOPE Court team members, including the Judge, and for all youth (100%) these connections have been maintained after they turned 18, via continued contact with team members and/or requested circles/hearings. The frequency of contact with adult team members, supportive approach, and other restorative practices elements (e.g., empathy, collaborative approach, doing things "with" the youth, rather than "to" or "for" the youth) were reported to contribute to the development of a trusted support network of adults to facilitate transition to independent living. The frequency and quality of communication and collaboration was cited as particularly helpful in developing "rapport" with youth and among team members and in meeting youth needs and "getting things done."

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 9 participants (75%) had remained in EFC or transferred to the PESS program as of September 1, 2023. The 75% participation rate in EFC or PESS for HOPE Court cohort 2 is noteworthy, when compared to the 30 to 40% participation rate

observed for all foster care youth who aged out between 2014-18. Additionally, all youth (100%) who remained in EFC continued to voluntarily participate in pre-court circles and/or court hearings. Of the 3 participants (25%) who were terminated from EFC, the time in EFC prior to termination was 9 months, 8 months, and 4 months. All HOPE Court youth (100%) evidenced participation rates exceeding two months. One youth who was terminated from EFC is currently receiving aftercare funds and is working toward the PESS program. For all youth in HOPE Court remaining in EFC or PESS, as of September 1, 2023, the mean time in EFC was 7 months (SD = 3.11) 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 represented an improvement on this indicator. Finally, analysis of FSFN 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 = 12), limiting the generalizability of the findings.

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, social desirability bias). A research team member, not affiliated with the program conducted youth interviews; however, due to scheduling challenges, research team members, who also served as program administrators also conducted interviews with youth participants. Given the nature of HOPE Court, which aims to create an environment of openness with youth and foster trust between youth and adult team members, program administrators did not believe youth were likely to "hold back" in providing feedback pertaining to their experiences with HOPE Court.

This was also considered in the design of the interview protocol and questions were designed to be neutral and facilitate an environment where youth would likely feel open to responding honestly. Additionally, given that this was the second implementation of HOPE Court, the youth sample size was small (n = 12) and consisted of youth who were selected to participate in HOPE Court. It is important to note that the selection criteria for cohort 2 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 cohorts 1 and 2. Research conducted with an increased number of youth in HOPE Court and in other settings would be beneficial in gauging effectiveness of the model in facilitating successful transition for foster care youth. Additionally, a longer-term follow-up study which includes a cost-benefit analysis would allow for examination of the outcomes in relation to the costs associated with the program. It is important to ascertain the benefits to youth beyond the 1-year timeframe of the current study. From a longer-term study we would be able to better determine the long-term benefits for HOPE Court participants and economic impact of the program.

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, 7 participants (58%) experienced abuse, 8 participants (67%) witnessed abuse, 5 participants experienced abandonment (42%), and 4 youth (33%) were deemed to be at imminent risk of abuse, abandonment or neglect at the time they entered care. Additionally, 5 out of 12 (42%) 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 with cohort 1 and the explanatory case study of cohort 2 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. Analysis of cohort 2 data indicated that as a result of the youth-centered model, frequency of contact and relationships developed with their HOPE Court teams, youth felt "supported" and notably, the majority of youth who were interviewed reported that participation in HOPE Court reduced their "stress," eased their worry, and/or had a "calming" effect. Youth participants attributed this to factors such as, being able to express their feelings and concerns, the support and connection with adult team members, and gaining a better understanding of steps they needed to take in their transition to adulthood. Further, 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, continuing their participation in HOPE Court activities and hearings, and remaining in contact with at least one support team member.

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Appendix A

HOPE Court Implementation Logic Model

Restorative Practices in Dependency Court - HOPE Court Program Logic Model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes: Short-Term	Outcomes: Long-Term
Children's Services Council of Broward County Funding Florida Institute for Child Welfare (FICW) Funding FLITE Center HOPE Court Team (HOPE Court Judge, Staff, Child Welfare Professionals) Nova Southeastern University (NSU) faculty NSU and FLITE Center office space	Restorative Legal Processes	• 10-12 older adolescent youth in foster care • Frequent (every 6 weeks) hearings • Circular (therapeutic) courtroom setup and process • Proceedings are youth-led	Increased participation of youth's "like family" members in independent living process	Improve school promotion rate
			Improve youth's relationship with social worker and "like family" members	Decreased homelessness
	Supportive Youth Circles	• Pre-court listening circles • Use of conflict circles to address needs • Independent living workshop circles	Increased youth engagement in dependency system processes	Decreased recidivism
			Youth retain state benefits (EFC & PESS)	Decreased incarceration
	Transitional Independent Living (TIL) Planning	• My Virtual Vision Board circles/activities	Increased feelings of hopefulness for youth	Improved psychosocial well-being
	HOPE Court Staff Training and Support	• Restorative Practices and Nonviolent Communication Follow-up and Refresher Training	Increased feelings of connection and support for youth	Increased independent living skills
			Child Welfare Professionals in HOPE Court feel valued and supported in their work	Increased retention of child welfare professionals
	HOPE Court Research	• Research team meetings; data collection/analysis; research reports		

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.	100%	0%	0%
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.	100%	0%	0%
10) My HOPE Court Virtual Vision Board reflects the life plan that I chose.	100%	0%	0%
11) My Virtual Vision Board workshop helped me to identify my life goals and who can help me accomplish them.	100%	0%	0%
12) HOPE pre-Court listening circles allowed me to participate in the planning of my case.	100%	0%	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.	100%	0%	0%
15) Once I am living independently, I feel confident I will be able to go to school or find a job.	90%	0%	10%
16) Once I am living independently, I feel confident I can continue to have positive relationships with others.	100%	0%	0%
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).	90%	10%	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 (or DCF case manager). 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)?
    a. Did the trainings meet your needs for connection and support?
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?

Appendix E

Restorative Practices Fidelity Observation Form

HOPE Court Restorative Practices Fidelity Assessment

Observer Instructions: Observe the HOPE Court activity (pre-court circles, court hearing) and place a check next to each element below, indicating whether the restorative practices element was "Observed," "Not Observed," or "Not Applicable (N/A)."

HOPE Court Restorative Practices Element	Observed	Not Observed	N/A
Communication			
Empathy • Empathy utilized (empathic communication) – presence (active listening), reflection, needs guesses (I'm guessing that you…) • Empathic Assertion: (uses "I" statements, validation of others' thoughts/feelings, non-judgmental and curious, use "and" instead of "but" when creating discrepancies) • Empathy Statements: e.g., "I would be hurt by that to," "I get it, that is a really hard thing to go through," "It sounds like you are feeling angry" • Using language to create connection			
Notes:			
Affective language utilized • Naming feelings and needs. Starts with observation "I see…" "I notice…" then a feeling statement "I feel frustrated…" "I am happy…," then a statement of need "I need your help…" "I value fairness…," then a plan or request "In the future…" "Would you be willing to…?" • Affective statements – "We're so happy for you that you passed your driving test." "I am thrilled that you attended all of your tutoring sessions." "We're really feeling concerned that you did not show for your dentist appointment, because we want you to have good health," "I was worried when I did not hear from you for 2 weeks." • *If conflict circle,* expressing feelings and/or sharing impact of behavior. Examples of			

affective questions – (conflict circle questions - what happened? What were you thinking of at the time? What have you thought about since? Who has been affected by what you've done? What do you think you need to do to make things right? How were you feeling at the time? How were you feeling since then?)			
Notes:			
Engagement & Process			
Respectful • One person speaks at a time (e.g., use of talking piece or other method to ensure each person can speak without interruption) • Tone is respectful among youth and adult team members (no shouting, cursing, etc.)			
Notes:			
Collaborative approach to problem solving and decision making • Problem solving and decision making which occurs in the meeting/hearing involves input of youth and adult support team members			
Notes:			
Youth voice is centered in process/Youth driven process • Youth is given a central role in the meeting/hearing. Youth given the opportunity to speak on multiple occasions and their input and preferences are prioritized.			
Notes:			
Participation • Meeting/hearing facilitators ensure all participant voices are given the opportunity to be heard • Adult support team members and youth are all given an opportunity to share their ideas in the meeting/hearing			
Notes:			
High expectations/high standards are established for the youth • High expectations and standards for behavior and progress toward goals are established and collectively supported.			
Notes:			

Accountability • Evidence the adult support team members are holding youth accountable in an active way (doing things "with" them, rather than "to" or "for" them)			
Notes:			
High level of support provided to youth • Adult support team members provide support for youth needs (e.g., plan for completing tasks together with youth) and respond to and address youth concerns			
Notes:			
Fair process • People are treated in a respectful and "fair" way through engagement, explanation, and expectation clarity: • "Engagement" – everyone affected by a decision has the opportunity to provide input and discuss possible courses of action • "Explanation" – once a decision has been made by a leader, the process and reasoning behind the decision are made clear to all stakeholders • "Expectation clarity" – everyone involved understands the implications of the decision, the specific expectations, and the consequences for failing to meet those expectations.			
Notes:			

Appendix F

Independent Living Skills Workshop Post Assessment

How helpful was the workshop with the following?

a. Learning something new

   Very helpful
   Helpful
   Unhelpful
   Very unhelpful

b. Learning about a benefit or support available to you

   Very helpful
   Helpful
   Unhelpful
   Very unhelpful

c. Preparing you for your transition to independent living

   Very helpful
   Helpful
   Unhelpful
   Very unhelpful

What was your favorite part of the workshop?

How could the Independent Living Skills Workshop(s) be more helpful for you?

Appendix G

Vision Board Workshop Youth Post-Assessment Survey

How much did you learn about your strengths today?

Very much
Quite a bit
Very little
Nothing at all

How helpful was today's vision board process in learning about benefits that are available to you?

Very helpful
Helpful
Unhelpful
Very unhelpful

How confident are you that your team will help support you to meet the goals you created?

Very confident
Confident
Unconfident
Very unconfident

How hopeful are you about your future?

Very hopeful
Hopeful
Unhopeful
Very unhopeful

What was your favorite part of the vision board?

What are other thoughts or comments you have?

Appendix H

Vision Board Workshop Stakeholder (Adult) Post-Assessment Survey

How much did you enjoy participating in the vision board circle?

- A great deal
- Somewhat
- A little
- Not at all

How well did the circle provide the youth with understanding and information regarding transitional independent living resources and benefits?

- Very well
- Well
- Somewhat
- Not at all

How well did the circle provide opportunity for strong youth voice?

- Very well
- Well
- Somewhat
- Not at all

How well does the process support youth to achieve their goals?

- Very well
- Well
- Somewhat
- Not at all

How well did the circle provide emotional support and connection for the youth?

- Very well
- Well
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Overall, how important was this circle to an effective transition for the youth?

- Very important
- Important
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

Compared to the typical TIL planning process (IL staffing), how much more or less does the vision board process provide opportunity for:

(a) youth engagement

- Much more
- More
- Neither more nor less
- Less

Much less

(b) adult support of youth
- Much more
- More
- Neither more nor less
- Less
- Much less

(c) youth understanding of resources
- Much more
- More
- Neither more nor less
- Less
- Much less

(d) connection and encouragement
- Much more
- More
- Neither more nor less
- Less
- Much less

What was YOUR favorite part of the circle?
Is there anything you would change about this circle?

Appendix I

Empathic Assertion Training Assessment

How helpful was the training in meeting your needs for learning and growth?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

How much did you feel inspired and encouraged in your work as a result of the training?

- A great deal
- Somewhat
- A little
- Not at all

How much do you think that the information provided will support/help/assist you in your specific work/career?

- A great deal
- Somewhat
- A little
- Not at all

How much do you think that the information provided will benefit you in your personal life?

- A great deal
- Somewhat
- A little
- Not at all

How well did the training provide you with helpful information regarding communicating with teens who have experienced trauma?

- Very well
- Well
- Somewhat
- Not at all

How well did the training provide practical ways to communicate/address conflict?

- Very well
- Well
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Appendix J

Introduction to Restorative Practices Training Assessment

How helpful was the training in meeting your needs for learning and growth?

- Very helpful
- Helpful
- Unhelpful
- Very unhelpful

How much did you feel inspired and encouraged in your work as a result of the training?

- A great deal
- Somewhat
- A little
- Not at all

How much do you think that the information provided will support/help/assist you in your specific work/career?

- A great deal
- Somewhat
- A little
- Not at all

How much do you think that the information provided will benefit you in your personal life?

- A great deal
- Somewhat
- A little
- Not at all

How well do you understand restorative practice and its theories as a result of the training?

- Very well
- Well
- A little
- Not at all

How much did the training help you to understand how to be a restorative practitioner?

- A great deal
- Somewhat
- A little
- Not at all

How well did the training provide you the experience of connection in a circle?

- Very well
- Well
- Somewhat
- Not at all

Overall, how worthwhile was the training for you?

- Very worthwhile
- Worthwhile
- Somewhat worthwhile
- Not at all worthwhile