

Implementation Lessons

Report #2
Parenthood Can Wait Program
Department of Social Services
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Overview

This brief focuses on the challenges faced and overcome during implementation of the Parenthood Can Wait (PCW) program. It also serves as a guide for future programs. The Missouri IV-D Family Support Division received a three year, \$1 million grant from the Office of Child Support Services in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to fund the PCW program as part of the Charting a Course for Responsible Parenting and Economic Mobility demonstration. This program focuses on teen parenthood and emphasizes a collaborative relationship between the Missouri IV-D Family Support Division and Missouri urban and rural school districts, with a core focus on improving the lives of the youth they serve. The PCW program provides activities and curriculum designed for at-risk youth receiving education through alternative high schools and youth in the custody of the Division of Youth Services (DYS).

The PCW program incorporates curriculum derived from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and introduces youth to topics such as friendships, bullying, human needs, goals, social media, confidence, self-esteem, conflict and anger management, time management, financial responsibilities of parenting, and child support.

The program provides youth with the skills to think critically about the choices they make about relationships, finances, and parenting. The curriculum is concept-based, engaging, research-driven, interactive, thought-provoking, and educational. By offering parenthood curricula, independent living skills, child support education, financial literacy, and mentoring services, the Family Support Division hopes to change teens' behavior and mindset to reduce the likelihood they live in poverty. To accomplish these goals, the PCW program offers pre-parenthood content aimed at youth that are not yet parents and teen-parenting content for those who are already parents or primary kinship caregivers. The PCW program may also help prevent the need for future family services by promoting responsible parenting choices by raising awareness of the financial, legal, and emotional responsibilities of parenthood.

Implementation Strategy

The PCW program is unique because it includes students from both DYS facilities (residential and day) and alternative schools. This allows us to compare the results of program delivery within two distinct environments which may allow for additional value-added understanding and lessons learned.

The PCW program is delivered by trained facilitators who have experience delivering education to at-risk youth. Facilitators understand:

- Educational goals of the PCW program

- Program model – what it is, why it works, and how to implement it
- Basic techniques to engage students in learning
- How to “take ownership” of planned lessons
- How to make connections for students between real life experience and the curriculum

Facilitators received extensive training and support focused on how to deliver the educational materials and use the modules of training most effectively with youth. Examples of the training and support facilitators received include the following “How to Plan Your Day” topics:

- How to plan for your lesson
- Review the upcoming module’s facilitator’s guide chapter
- Know how much time you will have for your lesson and adjusting as needed when in the classroom
- Become familiar with the concepts and key terms to ensure smooth facilitation
- Determine how to encourage students to reflect on the learning objectives and how they relate to the real world
- Prepping activity materials and organizing them before arriving in the classroom
- Identify student engagement strategies to be used in a particular situation
- Reach out to the curriculum contact person with questions

We developed an extensive online training resource to support current and future training.

Learning Management System (Canvas) Implementation

Early in the PCW program, we decided to incorporate a web based Learning Management System (LMS) to provide a virtual class option and hybrid learning environment for the students. We reviewed, acquired, and implemented Canvas as the support tool for the learning environment. Facilitators needed to understand the logistical concerns related to effectively using Canvas and how to deliver educational content from it. The facilitator orientation to the LMS included skills on how to:

- Sign up for a canvas account
- View canvas account
- Login to canvas
- use the global navigation menu
- Use the dashboard and view courses
- View modules
- View student progress
- View calendar
- View assignments and events

- View student results in a quiz
- Manage rubrics

Using a LMS would increase the amount of data that could be collected about the program, which would, over time, result in improved ability to conduct substantive evaluation. Like the PCW program, the evaluation strategy needs to evolve over time to ensure effective evaluation is carried out.

Measures of Implementation Success

The PCW program's curriculum was created to instill decision making capabilities and skills that youth can use in identifying the right path for themselves. Program success must, therefore, be at least partially defined in terms of outcomes. The PCW program's success is best measured through changes in attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about parenthood. PCW's goal-based evaluation focuses on capturing data about specific changes in the target population, including knowledge and skills gained and to what degree, and changes in behavior or beliefs related to participants' education, work, or health status.

Outcomes are measured across four parameters, including the extent to which:

- *Youth receive pre-parenthood curriculum:* pre-parenthood lessons on the benefits of delaying parenthood
- *Youth receive financial literacy curriculum:* how to manage their own financial future through the Junior Achievement financial literacy lessons
- *Youth parents receive curriculum on responsible parenting:* benefits of delaying the births of subsequent children
- *Youth parents receive curriculum on financial literacy:* how to manage their own financial future through the Junior Achievement financial literacy lessons

All measures of success are evidence-based so results are transparent and replicable. The adopted LMS implemented for managing the program provides the following outputs:

Youth-related findings:

- Student's prior knowledge
- Student's prior attitudes
- Changes in student's knowledge by gender, facility, age, teen parent status and course date
- Changes in student's attitude by gender, facility, age, teen parent status, and course date
- Student satisfaction with program
- Projected changes in students' behavior

Facilitator-related findings:

- Support for the program
- Fidelity to the planned curriculum
- Facilitator satisfaction with program
- Delivery site related insights
- Recommendations for improvement

Facility Administrator-related findings:

- Satisfaction with curriculum
- Recommendations

Other findings:

- Analysis of differences between facilities located in rural, micropolitan, metropolitan areas

Key Findings

Key findings indicate that the PCW program, as implemented, was well received by both youth and facilitators. Youth who completed modules in the program showed significant knowledge gain and expressed appreciation for the program. Data collected from facilitators who presented the materials to youth indicated a high degree of fidelity to the program as it was designed when adequate resources, especially internet and device access, were available. Facilitators reported that students were engaged in the knowledge content. Facilitators also reported a high degree of satisfaction with the program.

Findings also indicate that the program approach and educational materials were effective across DYS residential facilities and alternative schools despite geographical location of site or age of students.

Results from knowledge check pre-surveys (done before any Junior Achievement content was presented) at Camp Avery show that youth were able to correctly answer knowledge survey questions about 17 percent of the time. Youth were surveyed again for knowledge gain after each learning module was presented. After completing the second module, they were able to correctly answer survey questions 60 percent of the time. After the fourth module was completed, youth answered correctly on the post-survey 63 percent of the time. Post-tests for personal development modules show significant knowledge gain. On average, after participating in the learning modules, youth were able to answer post-test questions correctly 74 percent of the time as

compared to about 34.5 percent correct on the pre-test. There is no significant variation across data samples from metropolitan, micropolitan, or rural cohorts, possibly because of the mostly metropolitan geographic locations of the DYS facilities.

Participants indicated that opportunities to talk about issues and themselves in a comfortable environment was the best thing about the modules.

Administrators from four locations completed an evaluation of the program. Seventy-five percent believed the program increased awareness of teen parents. Fifty percent believed participation in the program improved policies around teen parenting and 75 percent believe that participation in the program improved support for minor parents. Equally, 75 percent believed participation in the program improved familiarity with the rights of parenting adolescents. Fifty percent believed discussion that is part of the program led to improved availability of subsidized childcare. The same administrators believed personal conversations carried out as part of the program helped youth greatly.

Non-educational Related Opportunities and Challenges

COVID-related restrictions created a significant barrier to implementing the PCW program. Lack of available COVID testing resulted in reduced access to residential youth. Several educational modules had to be delayed or were otherwise adjusted because program facilitators could not be tested before entering facilities. Despite the circumstances, few changes in the course timeline ensured proper delivery of the curriculum to the students. Alternative school settings also experienced COVID-related scenarios that were detrimental to the PCW program; the fluctuation between face-to-face and virtual educational content delivery created barriers. Despite the barriers, the PCW program successfully delivered content to youth in nine locations.

The Family Support Division responded to the needs of the school districts, facilities, facilitators, and students. We updated content presented based on student needs. Not every unit of content was presented to every student cohort identically. Over time, the strategy of adjustment will allow for further tailoring of the educational content to specific student circumstances. This adjustment strategy fits well with the overall care strategy used by DYS and by alternative schools. Data collected across these changes may also provide insight into future directions for maximizing the learning potential of these modules. The Family Support Division is maintaining a library of all the modules in every adjusted form so they can be reused when appropriate. This library will also be useful as the program determines fidelity to the curriculum.

Preliminarily, the findings of this report show engagement with the knowledge content and significant knowledge gain as well as support for the provision of additional resources, the need for policy change, and for the extension of the program to other youth. The policy and resource needs are perhaps best underscored by feedback from

administrators of facilities and schools where the PCW program was provided. These administrators noted that resources remain a barrier. Fifty percent of the same administrators believed that participation in the program improved policies around teen parenting. However, the lack of resources in some locations did not lead to reduced student knowledge gain.

Final Thoughts

Ultimately, the goal of the PCW program is to provide education and support for youth living in DYS facilities and those receiving education and support from alternative schools. Several students provided post-course feedback about their experience in the PCW program. Here are the answers provided by the participants to two questions:

1. The three most important things I learned from the PCW program are...

- "Financial, importance, responsibility"
- "That I need to start an account, how to prevent children, how important life is"
- "My worth, how to build credit, how to be a good parent"

2. What would you like to tell us about the PCW program? Any takeaways or things you will remember? Be honest!

- "I will try not to have a kid until on financially stable"
- "About how to invest my money"
- "I will remember the teacher telling us that no one really knows are worth except for us but you can tell how good a person is by the way that person acts"
- "The scariest thing about entering parenthood is having to pay bills and living on my own"
- "That it takes a lot of money to have enough"
- "The scariest thing about entering parenthood is knowing that you are on your own with some help (not much), but there is a lot of resources out there to help people who are struggling"

In conclusion, the information gathered for this project brief is based on information gathered throughout the first half of the program. We have gathered this information and will use it to guide us in the direction to go to enhance our curriculum and activities to positively impact future students who participate in the PCW Program.