

The Impact of Youth Villages' Intercept® Program on Placement Prevention: A Second Look

Executive Summary

PURPOSE

In our previous report, we found that Youth Village's Intercept program (previously known as YVIntercept) had a statistically significant impact on reducing the likelihood of out-of-home placement for children at risk of placement who were referred to the program by the Tennessee Department of Children's Services (DCS) between 1/1/2013 and 6/30/2018. In this report, we reassess the impact of Intercept with a separate group of children more recently reported for maltreatment (7/1/2018 to 12/31/2020).

Intercept is an integrated approach to in-home parenting skill development that offers a variety of interventions, informed by research and best practices in the field, to meet the individualized needs of a family. Intercept staff work with families with children who are at risk of either entry or re-entry into state custody (i.e. foster care) so as to prevent placement. DCS staff also refer children already in custody, with the goal of reducing time to reunification. Among those at-risk children, only children who were referred to the program before their first placement were included in this analysis.

THE ANALYSIS

Replicating the methodology used in our first study, this second prevention study uses a quasi-experimental design, relying exclusively on administrative data. All children referred to Intercept before placement in out-of-home care were included as part of the treatment group (Intent-to-Treat), regardless of the level of participation in services. The study used an exact matching method to define a comparison group, taking several variables and other confounds into account. Overall, the design adheres closely to evaluation requirements laid out by the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse guidelines for quasi-experimental designs.

THE FINDINGS

Consistent with the findings from our first study, our second evaluation of the Intercept program found that the Intercept program reduces the likelihood of placement. Among children referred to Intercept, the average treatment effect shows that the risk of placement was 37 percent lower than the children in the comparison group.

THE IMPLICATIONS

The federal Family First Prevention Services Act provides funding to states for placement prevention services, provided the state child welfare agency invests in evidence-based interventions. Even though the data in this study cover a shorter observation period, this study found that the initial result can be replicated with a non-overlapping population of youth drawn from a more recent timeframe. This second study strengthens the evidence we have that Intercept significantly reduces placement rates.

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