



**Circle of Friends Services Intervention &  
Treatment Program  
for Older Youth**

**Presented by: Amanda Reineck, RCSWI and Barbara Defazzio, LMHC, CCTP**



## Vision

Every teen needs a connection to a caring adult and the opportunity to learn what it means to be part of a family.





# What Teens Experience

## Baseline Data

- In the past year, children ages 11+ averaged 7 placement moves:
  - Foster homes: avg. 6.37 moves
  - Relative/non-relative: avg. 7.14 moves
  - Residential group care: avg. 7.97 moves
- 249 children residing with relatives and non relatives
- 174 children residing in group care
- 66 children residing in a foster home
- 60 foster homes licensed for ages 11+

Source: ARGOS, 05.29.2020

# The Journey - How Did We Get Here?

## Family Support Services Summit Presentation

- Highlighted an initiative to increase recruitment and retention of foster homes for teens
- Showed promising data regarding increased capacity of teen foster homes and a decrease in the number of children in group care

## Embrace Families Workgroup

- Team consists of representation from Network Support, Youth Services, Licensing, and Behavioral Health working together to replicate and enhance FSS's program
- In the past year we have:
  - Consulted with FSS
  - Conducted research within our own community
  - Identified opportunities to leverage existing resources
  - Engaged community providers
  - Established baseline data
  - Initial implementation



# Bundled Service Umbrella

- Intentional services for older youth and caregivers.
- Implementation vision
  - Promoted during recruitment
  - Promoted during training
  - Promoted during licensing
  - Promoted at the time of each placement of an older youth
- Array of services, available individually or together, to support the unique needs of each child and home:
  - Specialized Caregiver Training
  - Therapeutic Interventions
  - DJJ Support
  - Mentoring
  - Youth Engagement Initiatives
  - Caregiver Support Initiatives



# Circle of Friends Intervention and Treatment Program

- Key component of *Teen Embrace*
- MOU with Circle of Friends
- Designated Program Manager and unit of therapists with Adolescent and Trauma expertise
- Ongoing support from Embrace Families
- Leverages Medicaid funding

## How It's Different:

- Referral (required) made by Embrace Families
- 24-hour response time
- Intake within 72 hours
- Sessions 2x weekly for initial 30 days
- Caregiver engagement and support for entire household
- 24/7 crisis response
- Active participation in team working toward placement stability and permanency



**Circle of Friends Services**

a Division of Florida United Methodist Children's Home

# Implementation YTD

- Circle of Friends staffed by January 2020 and ready to accept referrals
- Embrace Families point of contact established for referral coordination and program support
- Data at six month mark:
  - 17 referrals made YTD
  - 11 active clients
  - 73% placement stability



# Baseline Profile of Older Foster Youth – Who Needs ITP?

Current symptoms related to trauma – per youth self report:

- Conflict with peers: (50%)
  - Problems with authority: (40%)
  - Aggression: (40%)
  - School problems: (50%)
  - Substance misuse: (10%)
  - Sexual inappropriateness: (10%)
- 
- CATS and ACE tests used for first referrals



# Becks Inventory - Evidenced Based Tool

- Becks Inventory is an evidenced based self report that measures self concept, anxiety, anger, depression and disruptive behaviors
- Initiated in May 2020 – 7 youth tested at entry into program to date
- Of the 7 tested, four reported “extremely elevated scores” in anxiety, anger, depression and disrupted behaviors. None reported an elevated score in self concept. Anxiety levels for all were significant
- Becks can be administered at admission, six month mark and discharge



# Program Initiated in February 2020

Data at sixth month mark:

	24 hour	72 hours	BA	Runaway	Arrested	Disrupt
January	0	0	0	0	0	0
February	10	11	0	1	0	1
March	2	19	0	0	0	0
April	5	11	0	1	0	0
May	0	0	1	0	0	4
June	0	5	0	1	0	1
July	2	12	1	0	0	0
August						
September						
October						
November						
December						

# Lessons Learned from Starting in a Pandemic

- School lockdowns and Stay at Home orders may have lessened the opportunities for school disruption and elopement
- But School lockdowns and Stay at Home orders also placed a lot of stress on everyone in the household – both youth and caregivers
- Initially caregivers were overextended with home schooling, employment disruptions and general anxiety about the pandemic – many were reluctant to commit the extra time needed to support youth within the parameters of ITP
- The result? – Weekends sometimes erupted into “circuit overload”

# Some Solutions Actually Emerged from the Pandemic

- AHCA eased restrictions of the use of Telemedicine during the pandemic—therapists were able to provide support for everyone in the family unit whenever needed - in camera or by phone if needed
- Therapists were able to follow youth, even if the placement needed to change or was disrupted for whatever reason. Telemedicine has its limitations, but in these cases it proved an asset to placement stability
- The ITP Team recognized the need for extra caregiver support at this time. The benefits of participating in ITP were stressed to caregivers prior to the placement
- Extra weekend support was offered every Friday afternoon via phone and text to caregivers. Weekend disruptions have been greatly reduced

# The Result?

- Caregiver buy-in to the benefits of ITP increased
- Both caregivers and youth were easily able to access therapists, COFS Program Manager and Embrace Families Clinical Support when needed on evenings or weekends.
- Use of virtual meetings during the pandemic allowed the entire ITP Team to meet monthly and brainstorm solutions to problems





# How are Circle of Friends Services and Embrace Families measuring success?

- % increase in placement stability for ITP involved youth
- % increase in average length of stay in placement(s) for ITP involved youth
- % increase in number of foster homes that take ITP involved youth
- % decrease in occurrence of symptoms related to trauma evidenced by ITP involved youth
  - % decrease in Baker Act admissions
  - % decrease in runaway episodes
  - % decrease in DJJ incidents
- % increase in reported retention of licensed homes with ITP involved youth placements

# Next Steps – Where Do We Go From Here?

- Continued development of Intensive Treatment Program – analyze all data for strengths and weaknesses
- Seek solutions from the people we serve – how do our youth and caregivers think we could improve the program
- Continued trauma training for our **ITP** therapists
- Continued interface of **ITP** with all aspects of **Teen Embrace**





# Teen Embrace



**Embrace Families<sup>SM</sup>**

**For more information,  
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The logo features three stylized human figures in blue, teal, and orange, arranged in a circular pattern. To the right of the figures, the word "Teen" is written in a dark blue, cursive font, and the word "Embrace" is written in a dark blue, bold, sans-serif font.

# Teen Embrace

The logo consists of a stylized human figure with arms raised, composed of four colored dots (blue, teal, orange, yellow) connected by lines.

**Embrace Families<sup>SM</sup>**

**For more information on ITP  
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**Thank You!**

