Evidence-Based Practices to Support Well-Being and School Success of Children and Youth In Out-of-Home Care

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Introduction

o Children and youth in out-of-home care face many challenges regarding their development and general well-being. As child protectives services (CPS) are more focused to provide a safe and stable environment, schooling is often not a priority (McNamara, et al., 2019). However, school well-being is an essential ingredient to children and youths functioning (Berridge, 2012).

o For numerous reasons, such as inadequate parent-child relationship to which they have been exposed, instability, frequent moves, absenteeism, etc., children in out of home care at high risk of school failure (Berridge, 2012; Welbourne & Leeson 2012). These children are less engaged in school, experience less success, get behind compared to their peers and drop out more frequently.

o In Quebec, compared to 75% of young people of the same age, only 17% of out-of-home care received a high school diploma before their majority; at 17 years old, 37% had experienced at least one episode of dropping out (vs 5% in general population) and 26,7% showed no academic delay (vs 79,1% of general population; Goyette and Blanchet, 2019; Goyette, Blanchet & Bellot , 2019).

o To support their general well-being and their schooling, researchers have examined effectiveness of school-focused interventions on different outcomes, such as success rates, academic perseverance and general school experience (Liabo, Gray and Mulcahy, 2012).

Objectives

Providing recommendations to health and social services for best practices to promote school well-being and success for children in out-of-home care based on empirical data, expertise of key practitioners in the context of Quebec CPS.

Methods

1) Scientific data
To provide a synthesis of the current state of knowledge and orient the recommendations regarding best practices for out-of-home care children, a systematic review was conducted.

o Studies from three data base and gray literature were identified (k = 9 505), screened, selected and codified independently by two reviewers. Disagreements were resolved by involving a third team members.

o In total, 31 studies met inclusion criteria: studies examining the effectiveness of interventions that involve CPS and promote school success and well-being (achievement, adjustment, perseverance) of children in out-of-home care, comparing a pre-post intervention measure, relative or not to a control group).

o Study quality was assed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (Pluye et al., 2011).

o Narrative analysis & effect sizes were computed to better understand the impact of interventions regarding the type of placement, nature of interventions, CPS role, and collaborative processes.

o The strength of the evidence was categorized for each findings ("established", "almost established", "emerging or unestablished" evidence), reflecting the confidence on a set of factors (methodological quality, study design, results consistency etc.).

2) Contextual and experiential data:
To ensure the applicability and relevance of best practices in the context of Quebec CPS, clinical expertise and contextual and data was gathered. While contextual data included administrative databases and government documents, expertise was based on four qualitative semi-structured interviews with school services managers from CPS, three follow-up committee with CPS clinicians and managers, and two meetings with children who experienced out-of-home care. Finally, recommendations were debated in a deliberation committee.

Results

Scientific data
Nature of the interventions
o Targeted interventions on academic and social skills (e.g., tutoring) are promising, especially for younger children in foster homes.
o Wrap-around individualized support was implemented mainly with teenagers in more complex situations and showed mixed .

CPS role & collaborative processes

Involvement	CPS role	Actions
Low	Referent	◉ Referrals towards services offered in the community ◉ Identify the needs of children ◉ Identify resources /Established partnerships
Moderate	Inform partners (consultation)	◉ Formal or informal communication between CPS and partners in school or community (few studies)
High	Concert & implement	◉ Formal concertation mechanisms ◉ Established structure facilitating CPS, school and/or community collaboration ◉ Joint decision-making

Contextual data
o Diversified educational pathways and services
o School services and social services are two distinct entities whose alignment is undermined by numerous organizational, ethical and economic issues.

Clinical expertise
Three main issues that needs to be addressed :
o Organizational and professional issues
   • Regulated mechanisms of communication and collaboration are lacking
   • CPS must promote education

o Issues relating to the efficiency of services
   • The necessity to individualize services to children needs

o Ethical issues
   • Clarify confidentiality issues
   • Normalize different routes

Limits
Several methodological limitations may affect the confidence towards results. Studies rely on accessible indicators of school success, mostly achievement measures. Assessment of vital factors that support school well-being success is lacking, making it difficult to understand the mechanisms by which interventions promote schooling

Discussion & Conclusion

After deliberation process, in which recommendations were debated and voted to ensure their scientific value, applicability, interpretation and readability,three prerequisites' conditions to implant other recommendations were stated addressing a) valuing the school as a lever for rehabilitation, b) maintaining high expectations, c) the need to state guidelines regarding communication with school partners.

Seven recommendations:
1. CPS should produce a portrait of the school situation in collaboration with their partners, including the school staff.
2. School support in the day-to-day life is offered by CPS workers and foster families, whether formalized or not, and must be maintained.
3. Preventive interventions should promote reading and create environment that encourages reading
4. To prevent learning difficulties, children in out-of-home care must have access to school tutoring programs.
5. Interventions focusing on establishing positive relationships with adults and peers, through pleasant activities, must be considered.
6. Interventions must include the family, as well as school and community partners. These actors work too often in silos.
7. For young people with complex school situations, it is necessary to put in place interventions based on consultation and shared decision-making involving all the actors concerned (social, school, community, medical, family).

References

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