Evaluating UGrad: Designing an Evaluation for a Case Management Approach to Supporting Foster-Care-Involved Youth

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Abstract
For this project, we have partnered with a Delaware-based nonprofit to explore and evaluate one of their programs, UGrad. UGrad is a case management program that pairs foster-care-involved youth (grades 1-12) with an advocate to identify, address, and alleviate barriers to educational attainment. The goals of this partnership include identifying common barriers for this population, outlining how UGrad contributes to positive youth development, and evaluating UGrad’s effectiveness on key academic outcomes. So far, we have used a combination of literature review and informal interviews with our community partner to create a logic model and to design our evaluation plan. Evaluation results from this project will be used to inform, strengthen, and expand current UGrad programming and the field of direct service work involving foster-care-involved youth.

Logic Model

**INPUTS**
- Youth
- UGrad advocates
- Advocate supervisors
- UGrad admin
- Hiring/Training protocol
- Visit protocol
- Office space
- Funding

**ACTIVITIES**
- Biweekly meetings with youth
- Phone communication with youth
- Weekly case supervision meetings
- Advocate meetings with school staff and support team
- Coordinate support resources
- Birthday/post-graduation visits

**OUTPUTS**
- Individualized action plans
- Case management notes
- Communication with support teams

**SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES**
- Grades in School
- Connectedness to UGrad advocate
- Future orientation
- Decision-Making Skills
- Self-determination/self-advocacy
- Self-esteem

**LONG-TERM OUTCOMES**
- Improved attendance
- Decreased behavioral incidents
- Grade promotion
- High school graduation
- College/post-secondary enrollment
- Employment

**IMPACTS**
Increasing educational attainment for foster-care-involved youth
Creating self-sustainable productive citizens

What is UGrad?
UGrad is a case management program that pairs a Delaware foster-care-involved youth (grades 1-12) with an advocate. Currently, they have 6 advocates serving 12-16 youth each. UGrad advocates meet with their assigned youth biweekly to identify and address current barriers to educational attainment. They also serve as advocates for the youth in meetings with school administration, teachers, social workers, or foster parents to address identified barriers. UGrad emphasizes the importance of continuity and consistency in support. As such, advocates continue working with their assigned youth if they transfer schools or foster-care placements, or if they are reunited with their biological family.

Barriers for Foster Care-Involved Youth
Foster-care-involved youth have historically been at high risk for disparities in educational attainment. Previously identified barriers for this population include:
- Poor mental health
- Inability to access special education resources
- High mobility rates – moving schools/foster placements
- Lack of conducive studying environments
- Uninvolved/unhelpful caregivers
- Lack of emotional coping skills (e.g. self-determination, problem-solving)
- Lack of social and emotional support

Evaluation Plan
GOALS OF EVALUATION:
- Identifying barriers to school and career success for foster-care-involved youth
- Outlining how UGrad programming is connected to positive youth development
- Evaluating how UGrad students compare to other foster-care-involved youth on key academic outcomes

YOUTH INTERVIEWS:
We will conduct interviews with youth involved with UGrad to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The goals of the qualitative interviews are to understand:
- Perceptions of UGrad program and UGrad advocate
- Academic experiences and barriers to academic achievement
- Behavioral challenges at school
- Future orientation and educational goals
Quantitative measures to be used include:
- Youth Connectedness to Provider Scale
- AIR Self-Determination Scale
- Educational Expectations
- Revised Adolescent Decision-Making Questionnaire (self-confidence subscale)
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS:
We are taking extra precautions to protect the youth we will be interviewing. This includes having the advocate join the Zoom call with the youth to facilitate introductions and having them on standby in a breakout room for the duration of the interview.

PRACTITIONER INTERVIEWS:
We will conduct interviews with UGrad advocates and leadership to understand the following:
- Roles and responsibilities as a UGrad advocate
- Academic barriers faced by their students
- Strategies for identifying and alleviating barriers for their students
- Recommendations to improve UGrad

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS
Secondary data will be collected and analyzed to evaluate how UGrad youth compare to other foster-care-involved youth on key metrics of educational attainment. Measures of interest include:
- High School graduation
- GPA
- Attendance
- Behavioral incidences
- Enrollment in post-secondary education

References

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