



Strengthening Connections

Youth and Provider Perspectives on Youth Running from Out-of-Home Placements

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- Connectedness is run prevention, intervention, and aftercare.
- Youth run from out-of-home placements when they become dysregulated to try to get their needs met. They run to connectedness and familiarity.
- Youth have a predisposition to test boundaries and desire autonomy over their own lives. Opportunities for both are limited in out-of-home placements, so running can reflect these typical adolescent needs.
- Providers must follow prescribed protocols when a youth runs and overall feel they do not have the autonomy to locate a youth who has run from a placement.
- The degree of connectedness youth feel with providers has an impact on their ability to psychologically and physically regulate after returning from a run.
- Programmatic and systemic barriers make it difficult to prevent a run from occurring.

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Abstract

In the 2022 legislative session, lawmakers passed House Bill 22-1375 Concerning Measures to Improve the Outcomes for Those Placed in Out-Of-Home Placement. This statute required the Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman to enter into an agreement with an institution of higher education to examine the issue of youth running away from out-of-home placements from a lived experience perspective. This report contains the results of five focus groups, two with out-of-home placement providers, and three with youth ages 12-17 currently residing in out-of-home placement. Providers and youth provided their perspectives on (1) What conditions led to running from an out-of-home placement? (2) What efforts were made to locate a child or youth after a running incident? (3) What services were provided to the child or youth after a running incident? and (4) What programmatic and systemic barriers make it difficult to prevent a run from occurring? In addition to the questions required by statute, the results also provide insight into what happens right before a running incident, the impact of childhood trauma on running behaviors, a lived experience perspective on prevention efforts, and the importance of connectedness for youth in out-of-home placements.

Table Of Contents

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Project Rationale and Description
- Project Rationale
- Project Description
- Methods
- Purpose of Qualitative Research Perspectives
- Sample
- Focus Group Protocol
- Key Findings
- What conditions led to running from an out-of-home placement?
- What efforts were made to locate a child or youth after a running incident?
- What services were provided to a child or youth after a run?
- What programmatic and systemic barriers make it difficult to prevent a run from occurring?
- Opportunities for Prevention: Consequences and Connectedness
- Conclusion
- Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocols for Youth and Providers
- Appendix B: Additional Focus Group Participant Quotes by Topic
- Appendix C: Coding Strategy
- Endnotes

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Note on Language Regarding “Runaway”

The Timothy Montoya Task Force is working to develop common language that accurately reflects a child or youth’s experience on the topic of “runaway.” For the purposes of this report, language from House Bill 22- 1375 will be used to ensure required elements of the bill were fulfilled.

Introduction

Timothy Montoya was a 12-year-old residing in an out-of-home placement who was tragically hit and killed by a car in 2020 while on the run from an out-of-home placement. His death highlighted statewide concerns about the lack of consistent, prompt and effective responses to youth who run from out-of-home placements. In 2022, House Bill (HB) 22-1375 Concerning Measures to Improve the Outcomes for Those Placed in Out-of-Home Placement Facilities was passed in Timothy Montoya’s honor.

Timothy Montoya’s life ended tragically as a result of running from an out-of-home placement. Running from out-of-home placements is a common occurrence resulting in potentially dangerous situations such as being a victim of crime, injury, or death. The Office of Colorado’s Child Protection Ombudsman and professionals in the child protection field assert that Colorado is in a mental health state of emergency. The rise in children and youth mental health concerns in Colorado has caused concern for out-of-home treatment facilities, parents, child welfare agencies, and legislators. Stakeholders like these see a need for statewide quality assurance and accountability systems, and supports for children with runaway behaviors. Such tools are valuable for promoting quality services for high- needs children. With such tools in place, caregivers can feel assured that their child’s placement will be safe. Concerned stakeholders also value the importance of amplifying child and youth voices to enhance understanding of runaway behaviors.

“Not all kids run away because they’re necessarily bad kids or because they want to make bad decisions, but sometimes it’s because they don’t know what to do and they’re looking for help. ...it’s not necessarily because they’re bad or that they want to make bad decisions but because they... trauma. They are looking for something, they’re looking for a way to get their needs met, and don’t know how to get those needs met. So, they’re trying whatever way they know how rather than trying a healthy, more positive manner.”

– Youth Focus Group Participant

The purpose of HB 22-1375 is to establish the Timothy Montoya Task Force to Prevent Children from Running Away from Out-of-Home Placements, which began in September 2022 and will meet for two years. One of the requirements of the Task Force is to analyze root causes of why children run away from placement in order to develop a consistent, prompt, and effective response for children who run away from placement and will also address the safety and well-being of children upon return to placement after a run.

Additionally, HB 22-1375 required the Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman to enter into an agreement with an institution of higher education with experience in child welfare research to conduct focus groups with providers and youth in out-of-home placements to better understand the lived experience on this topic. The statute specifically requires the researcher to conduct focus groups with children and youth who have experienced out-of-home placement. The five focus groups were conducted in early 2023 across Colorado, and this report highlights the findings. Providers and youth provided their perspectives on (1) What conditions led to running from an out-of-home placement? (2) What efforts were made to locate a child or youth after a running incident? (3) What services were provided to the child or youth after a running incident? and (4) What programmatic and systemic barriers make it difficult to prevent a run from occurring? In addition to the questions required by statute, the results also provide insight into what happens right before a running incident, the impact of childhood trauma on running behaviors, a lived experience perspective on prevention efforts, and the importance of connectedness for youth in out-of-home placements.

Project Rationale and Description

Project Rationale

Children and youth who reside in residential treatment facilities often face significant behavioral health needs and are provided with critically important services to meet their complex needs in their out-of-home placements. Running away from out-of-home placements such as residential treatment facilities is common. While there are a variety of reasons a child may run from out-home-placement, running is a coping behavior. Prior research indicates children are either running to (access), or running from (avoidance of someone or something).

Running away can adversely affect children and youth in a multitude of negative ways including criminal victimization, sexual exploitation, physical and mental health problems, homelessness, and delinquent behavior. The most severe risk to children and youth who run away is the risk of dying from intentional or accidental means.

Project Description

This project provides critical data to inform the Task Force on the following primary questions related to youth who run from out-of-home placements:

- What conditions led to running from an out-of-home placement?
- What efforts were made to locate a child or youth after a running incident?
- What services were provided to the child or youth after a running incident?
- What programmatic and systemic barriers make it difficult to prevent youth from running from an out-of-home placement?

In addition to the questions required by statute, the results also provide insight into what happens right before a running incident, the impact of childhood trauma on running behaviors, a lived experience perspective on prevention efforts, and the importance of connectedness for youth in out-of-home placements.

Program / Service Name	Evidence Designation	Last Reviewed	Action Required	Colorado Status
Child First	Supported	May 2021	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet victous allegro nada
Foster Healthy Futures for Preteens	Supported	June 2022	Lorem ipsum dolor sit ametLorem ipsum dolor sit amet	Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet
Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	Promising	June 2019	Lorem ipsum dolor sit ametLorem ipsum dolor sit amet	Lorem ipsum dolor sit ametLorem ipsum dolor sit ametLorem ipsum dolor sit amet
Fostering Healthy Futures For Teens	Does not meet criteria	June 2022	Lorem ipsum dolor sit ametLorem ipsum dolor sit amet	Lorem ipsum dolor sit
Lorem Ipsum	Not yet rated	N/A	Lorem ipsum dolor sit ametLorem ipsum dolor sit amet	Lorem ipsum dolor sit ametLorem ipsum dolor sit amet

Figure 1. Colorado's Family First Evidence-Building Pipeline

Evidence Building Pipeline

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