



Lifebook Program

FINAL RESEARCH SUMMARY

ABSTRACT

Children entering the child welfare system experience multiple losses including separation from their biological families, possible foster placement changes, and disconnection from their schools, friends, neighbors, and communities. These losses put them at risk for negative outcomes. When children are subject to these types of losses, they may benefit from knowing about and having opportunities to talk about their past experiences and relationships in order to make sense of those experiences and integrate them into their current realities. Even if children's removal from their biological homes is permanent, they will carry their past selves into their present and future experiences. Lifebooks are a way for children to learn about and maintain memories from their past. Lutheran Social Services of Illinois' (LSSI) Lifebook Program provides trained professionals to work with children and families to locate information from children's past experiences and create concrete "books" that includes that information and can follow children wherever they may live. LSSI sought to further information about the effects of their Lifebook Program on the functioning of children within their foster placements. LSSI hypothesized that children who received Lifebook Program services would gain further information about their families, would feel more comfortable talking with their foster parents about their past experiences, and would improve their daily functioning after receiving Lifebook Program services.

INTRODUCTION/REASONS FOR RESEARCH

Children entering, moving through, and exiting the foster care system can experience repeated separations and losses in addition to the abuse or neglect they suffered prior to entering the child welfare system. Those children needing to be removed from their birth families are placed into a new caregiving system, typically foster families but sometimes in shelter systems as well. Children experiencing maltreatment, possibly from multiple sources, as well as experiencing multiple losses, are at significant risk for negative outcomes. These negative outcomes can include attachment problems, dysregulation, anxiety, affective disorders, addiction, aggression, health problems, and risks for revictimization. (Dube, Anda, Felitti, Chapman, et al., 2001; Dube, Anda, Felitti, Crogt et al, 2001; Felitti et al, 1998; Gordon, 2002; Herman, Perry, & van der Kolk, 1989; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobovitz, 1999; Simpton & Miller, 2002; Yehuda, Spertus, & Golier, 2001).

Challenging behaviors that children exhibit in foster care may be influenced by their traumatic experiences and subsequent losses. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN, 2003), children with complex trauma symptoms can benefit from building nurturing, trusting relationships with others, developing emotion regulation skills, and making meaning about their past traumatic experiences. Making meaning about past traumatic events can include integration of children's past experiences with their current experiences and hopes for the future. In order to make meaning of their past, children need the opportunity to talk about their past experiences, ask questions, and fill in gaps not only in their perceptions but also in concrete information about what happened to them. Caseworkers, foster families, and birth families may be uncertain about how to talk with children about their past experiences and positively engage them about their current and future lives.

When children do not have opportunities to discuss their experiences, especially traumatic ones, they

may develop distorted views about why they are in foster care, how people feel about them, and how they feel about themselves. For example, children may understand their placement in foster care as the result of their misbehavior or their parents being angry with them. As these children move through foster care, they may experience subsequent placement changes as further evidence that they are unloved and unlovable. They may do poorly in school because they feel they are not capable of doing well and may reject positive interactions from foster families because they feel they are not worthy of such positive regard.

In addition to having gaps of information regarding why they came into care and why they moved from various placements, children often do not have information about other family members and family histories. Limited information about their families and histories may fuel children's distortions about their past and facilitate them feeling different and/or inferior to other children who have not had a foster care experience.

In order to promote children's self-esteem and typical development, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) encourages limiting disruptions in children's foster placements and ongoing connections with birth families whenever possible. The DCFS Foster Family Handbook (2003) promotes the use of Lifebooks by foster families to help children “cope with feelings of grief, loss and separation from family and his former life.” Lifebooks, according to the DCFS Foster Family Handbook, are an “account of the foster child's life in words and pictures.” The Handbook encourages foster families to use Lifebooks to help foster children rebuild the past and record the present.

Pictures and all the information gathered for the children’s Lifebooks allow children to look back on themselves and their lives. This is one way children can reflect on themselves, develop their identities, and create complete life stories, rather than life stories that are fragmented, missing memories, or full of magical thinking and unanswered questions.

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) is a large statewide agency with more than ten program sites monitoring approximately 2,000 children in their foster care program. With funding from the Christopher Family Foundation, LSSI spent two years exploring and creating “My Awesome Life,” a Lifebook that allows children to answer open ended questions about themselves, their families, their experiences and their goals for the future. LSSI created “My Awesome Life” with input from children, professionals working with children, and their families. LSSI also hired five Lifebook Specialists to facilitate Lifebook work across the state in LSSI's existing programs. LSSI reported that they gave out over 2,500 Lifebooks to children served by LSSI. In addition they report that:

- 200 children attended Lifebook groups led by Lifebook Specialists
- 400 children received one on one Lifebook assistance from a Lifebook Specialist
- Over 300 LSSI staff were trained on the use of Lifebooks with children
- 500 foster parents/caregivers received training on Lifebooks

Use of “My Awesome Life” respects children's perspectives and their “truth” in regards to their understanding of their life experiences. Children act as guides to adults in terms of how much and which information they would like to explore regarding their histories and their future. Lifebooks include opportunities to look at children's histories from different perspectives and are constantly evolving documents. Lifebooks allow pages for what others think about the children's experiences but supports that children may have a different perspective regarding their past and their perspective may change over time, especially as the intervention progresses.

LSSI was interested in engaging in applied research to evaluate the effectiveness of their Lifebook

Program. Lifebooks are a way for children to not only explore those areas of their lives but to have tangible documentation of those experiences that they can carry with them regardless of their permanency goal. Lifebooks also provide foster parents and birth parents with a tool to talk with children about sometimes difficult topics. Through their participation in Lifebook activities, LSSI believes that foster parents and birth parents may gain insight into children's behaviors and feelings and increase the empathy that they have toward their children. Foster parents and birth parents may also gain confidence in being able to talk with children about their lives.

Participation in the Lifebook Program tests the view that it is better not to re-open what is in the past and that such re-opening of past experiences may be emotionally painful to children and cause greater problems than children being unknowledgeable about their past. Participation in the Lifebook Program challenges the belief that processing of children's past experiences and family histories are solely the work of therapists and cannot or should not be facilitated, at least in part, by foster parents or non-therapists.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The LSSI Lifebook Program staff felt that their services were helpful to children and families but wanted to engage in an applied research project to measure effects of participation in the program. LSSI posed that children's functioning and abilities to talk about their past experiences with foster parents would improve after participation in the Lifebook Program. LSSI identified the following questions to guide the research project.

- Does children's functioning improve after participation in the LSSI Lifebook Program?
- Are there differences in functioning between children who worked with an LSSI Lifebook Specialist and children who did not work with an LSSI Lifebook Specialist?
- Do children who participate in the LSSI Lifebook Program gain additional knowledge of their histories?
- Are children and foster parents who participate in the LSSI Lifebook Program better able to talk about children's past experiences and relationships?
- Are child and foster parents satisfied with LSSI Lifebook Program services that they received?

MEASURES USED

The following is a list of materials/tools used for the research method described in the previous section. Explanation of these tools will follow later in this section.

- LSSI Lifebook Program Pre-Knowledge Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (Appendix A)
- LSSI Lifebook Program Pre-Knowledge Questionnaire for Foster Parents (Appendix B)
- LSSI Lifebook Program Post-Knowledge Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents (Appendix C)
- LSSI Lifebook Program Post-Knowledge Questionnaire for Foster Parents (Appendix D)
- LSSI Lifebook Program Demographic Form (Appendix E)
- LSSI Post-Intervention Level of Intervention Form (Appendix F)
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Appendix G)

Explanation of Tools:

- **Pre-Knowledge Questionnaires** for children and foster parents were designed specifically for this research project to inquire about children's and foster parents' comfort levels in discussing

children's histories as well as ask what information families have about children's histories.

- **Post-Knowledge Questionnaires** for children and foster parents were designed specifically for this research project to inquire about any changes in the comfort levels of families in discussing children's histories as well as inquire about any new information concerning the children's histories that was gathered during the LSSI Lifebook intervention.
- **Demographic Form** was created specifically for this research project to gather non-identifying information about the families involved in the research project, such as the level of foster care that the child was receiving and the level of foster care experience the foster parent had. This information was gathered to help identify any correlations between these factors and children's outcomes.
- **Post-Intervention Level of Intervention Form** was created specifically for the Lifebook Specialist to describe the intensity and frequency of the Lifebook intervention used for each family involved in the research. This data was gathered to identify any correlations between the type of Lifebook intervention that the family received with the children's outcomes.
- **SDQ** is a standardized behavioral screening questionnaire that asks about 25 attributes both positive and negative. Questions are divided into 5 scales including: 1) emotional symptoms; 2) conduct problems; 3) hyperactivity/inattention; 4) peer relationship problems; and 5) prosocial behaviors. The total of scales 1-4 are used to determine a difficulties score while the scores from scale 5 are used to determine a strengths score. SDQ's were completed by foster parents and children participants age 11 years and older. When children were younger than 11, only scores from foster parent were used to determine children's functioning.

METHODS/PROCEDURES

In order to measure improvements in children's functioning as a result of their participation in LSSI Lifebook Program services, SDQ's were administered to foster parents and children prior to their participation in the Lifebook Program and at the end of their Lifebook Program services. These scores were compared, and it was hypothesized that there would be decreased in scores from SDQ scales 1-4 (behavior problem areas) and increases in scores from SDQ scale 5 (prosocial behaviors).

In order to measure improvements in children's knowing about and ability to talk about their histories with foster parents, pre-knowledge questionnaires were administered to foster parents and children 11 years and older prior to engaging in LSSI Lifebook Program services. Post-knowledge questionnaires were administered to foster parents and children upon completion of Lifebook Program services. It was hypothesized that children and foster parents would have increased information about their histories and would endorse feeling more comfortable talking with each other about their histories on their post-know ledge questionnaires.

In order to measure families' satisfaction with participation in the LSSI Lifebook Program, families were administrated a satisfaction survey at the end of their participation in the program. It was hypothesized that families would be satisfied or very satisfied with their participation in the program.

LSSI was also interested in finding out if children who participated in the Lifebook Program maintained more stability in their foster care placements than other children in comparable foster placements. In order to make this comparison, LSSI hoped to compare the length time in current foster placements for children in the LSSI intervention group with the length of time in current foster placements for children in the CH+A control group. While many factors can contribute to stability of foster placements, factors that were out of the researchers' control, LSSI wished to see the differences in placement stability within the subjects examined.

Each LSSI family involved in the research project was assigned an LSSI Lifebook Specialist who provided the research intervention to the child/family. Lifebook Specialists are able to provide a variety of services to children and families. Services are tailored to the needs of each child/family and therefore will not be provided in a uniform manner across the research group sample. Lifebook Specialists were asked to complete a checklist of services that they did provide to the family when they complete the Post-Intervention Level of Intervention Form.

All participants were given the opportunity to participate in all, some, or none of the research process. Refusal to participate in the research process did not exclude families from receiving LSSI Lifebook Program services.

Research interventions began in May 2012 and data was collected from subjects until March 2013. A total of 64 intervention group subjects were used for the research project. A total of 14 control group subjects were used for the research project. The control group had challenges with obtaining consent for child subjects, therefore, only a small number of participants were obtained before the data collection ended.

All children participating in the research were DCFS wards. In order to include DCFS wards in research projects, institutional review board (IRB) approval is required from DCFS. IRB approval was obtained by DCFS in March 2012. Once IRB approval is obtained, each research participant and/or his/her guardian (DCFS) must review and sign a consent for research form. Those forms must be sent into the DCFS consent line and signed by DCFS personnel, who may or may not be familiar with the research study. Consents included documentation about the study and DCFS IRB approval.

Research subjects were between the ages of eight and eighteen years. Children involved in the research were assigned a Lifebook Specialist who can provide a variety of interventions with them and their families. These children were referred to the LSSI Lifebook Program and had no previous experience with LSSI Lifebook Specialists or their interventions. Children at any level of foster care (traditional, relative, or specialized) or permanency goal were eligible for participation in the study. Children had to be able to complete the pre and post knowledge questionnaires for minors either on their own or with the assistance of an adult, other than the Lifebook Specialist.

Foster parents involved in the study had at least one foster child involved with Lifebook Program activities. Foster parents at any level of experience in fostering were eligible for the study. Foster parents had to be able to complete the pre and post knowledge questionnaires for foster parents on their own or with the assistance of another adult, other than the Lifebook Specialist.

LSSI employed five Lifebook Specialist across the state of Illinois. Four of the Lifebook Specialists had bachelor's degrees, and one specialist had a master's degree. All Lifebook Specialists had specific training in Lifebook work and all had previous experience as child welfare caseworkers. Lifebook Specialists were responsible for training staff and foster parents, as well as doing whatever they can to help caseworkers get Lifebooks to children in LSSI foster care programs. Lifebook Specialists were also assigned "targeted cases" where they engaged children individually to complete pages from "My Awesome Life." Lifebook Specialists also looked into children's histories and obtain documentation to include in Lifebooks. Specialists assess each family's ability to participate in the Lifebook process and make adjustments in families' participation level as needed.

Control group: Children's Home + Aid (CH+A) is a large statewide agency with three foster care program sites in its Metropolitan region monitoring approximately 400 children. It is comparable in size and services offered to LSSI. The CH+A participants may have been exposed to the concept of Lifebooks in their services with CH+A but will not have been exposed to the specific services of LSSI's Lifebook Specialists or the "My Awesome Life" Lifebook created by LSSI. LSSI agreed to provide training and consultation to CH+A after completion of the LSSI Lifebook Program research protocol.

DATA COLLECTED

64 intervention group participants (LSSI families) were identified for the research project. Of those 64 identified participants, 4 chose not to participate or were unavailable to complete research questionnaires. Of the 60 participants who completed pre-intervention questionnaires, 16 refused or were unavailable to complete post-intervention questionnaires by the time that data collection was terminated.

14 control group participants (CH+A) were identified for the research project. These control group subjects came from the mid-central region of Illinois (Bloomington and surrounding areas). The LSSI participants came from the Northern, Central, and Southern regions of the state. Data collection for the control group was significantly limited by challenges in obtaining consents from DCFS for children to participate in the study. By the time the consent challenges were resolved, data collection was close to termination for the project.

Demographic Information

Data Elements	Intervention Group	Control Group
Number of subjects	60 (44 completed pre and post data)	14
Number closed in Lifebook services	Total = 19 Reasons for closing: Objectives completed 100% Therapist continue 57.9% FP continue 31.6% FP not cooperating 5.3% FP not keeping appts 26.3% Ch not keeping appts 26.3% Other 21.1% (4, 3 ret home)	0
Region (n=48)	Northern 13 Central 24 Southern 11	Central 14
Age Range	8-19	6-17
Gender (n=60)	31 Female 29 Male	8 Female 6 Male
Race/Ethnicity (n=50)	Black or African American 23 Hispanic or Latino 2	Black or African American 2

	White	23	White	
	Other	2	Bi-racial	10
				2
	Recent placement change	26		
	Child wants more info	13		
	No birth family contact	9		
Referral Reason (n=50)	Therapist requested	5	Research control group	
	Other	5		14
	Almost Adopt/Guard	3		
	Perm goal changed	3		
	FP requested	2		
	Behavior symptoms	1		
			Return Home	6
			Adoption	5
Permanency Goal (n=50)	Return Home	36	Guardianship	1
	Adoption	1	Sub Care pending TPR	0
	Guardianship	4	Independence	2
	Sub Care pending TPR	4		
	Independence	5		
Birth Family Visits (n=50)	34 of 50 (68%)		11 of 14 (79%)	
			Traditional	4
			Specialized	2
Foster Care Level (n=50)	Traditional	23	Relative (lic or unlic)	8
	Specialized	1	Trans Living Placement	0
	Relative (lic or unlic)	24		
	Trans Living Placement	2		
Avg Months in Foster Care	15.33		23.0	
Avg Months in Placement	7.57		16.5	
Number receiving therapy	23 of 45 (51%)		8 of 14 (57%)	
Previous Lifebook Services	9 of 47 (19%)		2 of 14 (14%)	

RESULTS

Does children's functioning improve after participation in the LSSI Lifebook Program?

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a standardized brief behavioral questionnaire

that identifies strengths and challenges for children in regards to their behaviors and functioning in six areas: stress, emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity-inattention, peer problems, and prosocial behavior.

Parents and children age 11-17 completed this pre-study and post-study questionnaire and were given a score from low to high risk in the five areas.

Intervention group foster parents/caregivers showed positive change between pre and post-intervention in four of the six areas: stress (change/decrease of 34), attention (change/decrease of 23), relating (change/decrease of 11) and helpfulness of the children (change/increase of 23). There were small negative increases in emotional symptoms (change of 3) and behavior (change of 2).

Control group participants completed pre-study SDQ's, but these were not completed post-study.

Are there differences in functioning between children who worked with an LSSI Lifebook Specialist and children who did not work with an LSSI Lifebook Specialist?

While inferences could be made from responses to certain questionnaire and post-intervention items, this question is difficult to answer due to the control group not having post-Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires.

The average number of months in placement for the intervention group was 7.7 months, with 14% placement disruptions. 52% of children were referred for Lifebook services because of a recent placement change. The control group's average time in placement was significantly higher at 21 months, and placements for those children remained stable through the study period.

Do children who participate in the LSSI Lifebook Program gain additional knowledge of their histories?

Children in the intervention group were asked if they wanted to know more about why they were in foster care on their pre-intervention questionnaire. 42% (21 of 50) endorsed Strongly Agree or Agree, 30% were unsure, and the remaining 28% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

On their post-questionnaires, these children (n=44) were asked about knowing more concerning why they were in foster care after Lifebook services. Most children indicated that they now knew more about why they were in foster care (81.8%), while 13.6% were still unsure, and 4.5% disagreed concerning knowing more.

A related question asked if the children in the intervention group would like to know more about their birth families. 65.3% indicated that they would like to know more, while 14.3% were unsure and 20.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed with wanting to know more about their birth families.

The follow-up post questionnaire question revealed that 72.7% indicated they knew more about their birth families after Lifebook Specialist intervention, 18.2% were unsure if they knew more, and 9.1% felt they had not learned any more about their birth families.

57.1% of children in the control group endorsed that they wanted to know more about why they were in foster care, and later 66.7% indicated they knew more about why they were in foster care. Of the 42.9% who did want to know more about their biological families, 75% endorsed that they knew more post-study.

It is unclear if children who initially indicated that they did not want to know more about why they were in foster care or more about their birth families did so because they did not want to know, or because they thought they knew already and after the intervention, they gained more knowledge.

Are children and foster parents who participate in the LSSI Lifebook Program better able to talk about children's past experiences and relationships?

Intervention group foster parents/caregivers generally endorsed that they were comfortable talking with their children about their children’s birth families (Pre-Q 98%, Post-Q 97.6). After Lifebook services, they felt on average more comfortable answering questions from their children about previous placements (Pre-Q 86%, Post-Q 97.6%). More parents, 69.3%, endorsed Strongly Agree in answering regarding their comfort discussing their children’s birth families before the intervention than after, 48.8%.

The pre-questionnaire showed that 73.5% of children in the intervention group indicated that they were comfortable talking with their foster parents/caregivers about their birth families. This increased post-intervention to 86.4%. 70.8% of the children indicated pre-intervention that they were comfortable talking with their parents about where they used to live; post-intervention, there was only a slight change, to 72.7%.

Parents/caregivers in the control group indicated that they were comfortable both in talking with their children about birth families and about previous placements, both pre-study responses (100% for birth families, 92.9% for previous placements), and in post-study responses (90.9% for birth families, 100% for previous placements).

For children in the control group, there was little change between pre and post-study responses. Most children indicated they were comfortable talking with their foster parents/caregivers about their birth families (Pre-Q 85.7%, Post-Q 83.3%) and about their previous placements (Pre-Q 92.9%, Post-Q 81.8%), though there was a decrease in comfort talking about previous placements from pre to post-study.

Are child and foster parents satisfied with LSSI Lifebook Program services that they received?

The questions on the foster parent/caregiver and child/adolescent post-questionnaires yielded strong results indicating that both parents and children felt the Lifebook Specialist listened to them (97.5% of 95.4% of children), they were satisfied with the Lifebook services provided (100% of parents, 93.1% of children) and they would recommend the service to others (100% of parents, 88.4% of children).

Question	Parent/Caregiver (n=41)	Child/Adolescent (n=44)
My Lifebook Specialist listened to me	70.7% Strongly	54.5% Strongly

	Agreed	Agreed
	26.8% Agreed	40.9% Agreed
	0% Unsure	4.5% Unsure
	2.4% Disagreed	0% Disagreed
	0% Strongly Disagreed	0% Strongly Disagreed
	72.5% Strongly Agreed	54.5% Strongly Agreed
I am satisfied with Lifebook program services	27.5% Agreed	38.6% Agreed
	0% Unsure	4.5% Unsure
	0% Disagreed	2.3% Disagreed
	0% Strongly Disagreed	0% Strongly Disagreed
	75.6% Strongly Agreed	55.8% Strongly Agreed
I would recommend Lifebook program services	24.4% Agreed	32.6% Agreed
	0% Unsure	7.0% Unsure
	0% Disagreed	2.3% Disagreed
	0% Strongly Disagreed	2.3% Strongly Disagreed

DISCUSSION

Researchers noted that only 42% of children in the intervention group reported they wanted to know more about why they came into foster care. Researchers reasoned that children may feel they know enough about the reasons for their foster care placement and/or they have concerns about knowing about or hearing about these reasons. Further information about their abuse and/or neglect may be painful for children to learn about and/or children may feel the need to minimize or deny aspects of their abuse/neglect in order to preserve the image of their biological families as “good.” Children may also have some concerns that their biological families may get into trouble or may be hindered in their reunification efforts if their abusive/neglectful behaviors are discussed further.

Researchers also noted that only 65% of children in the intervention group wanted to know more about their biological families. These results may be due to the fact that the children already knew a sufficient amount of information about their biological families, they did not think further information was available, or they may have had concerns that their interest in their biological families would put their relationships with their foster families at risk. Lifebook Specialists indicated that 68% of the subjects had visitation with their biological families.

As noted above, the intervention group’s participants had less time in placement and more placement disruption than the control group participants. A significant number of intervention group participants had a permanency goal of Return Home and were referred for Lifebook services because of recent placement changes.

Recent placement change, reunification as the permanency goal, and a relatively short time between pre and post SDQ's, are some reasons why there were not significant positive changes in parent SDQ scores. With more time for intervention and more time in placement, it would be hoped that there would be further changes in behavior and emotional symptoms.

There were a few issues with missing data, miscoded data, and incomplete responses. Clients closed, and there was no post-data available. The control group was significantly smaller than the intervention group, and these participants were from one area (Mid-Central region, Bloomington and surrounding areas); this sample was not as diverse regionally as the intervention group.

CONCLUSION

This research study focused on five questions concerning the Lifebook services provided by LSSI Lifebook Specialists. The first question asked was if children's functioning improved after services were offered. A standardized measure, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, was utilized pre and post-intervention to measure change in six areas: stress, emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity-inattention, peer problems, and prosocial behavior. Children's functioning improved in four of the six areas, with small negative increases in the other two.

The second question involved the differences in functioning between those children receiving the intervention and those who did not. This question was difficult to answer due to the lack of post-study Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires from the control group.

The third question asked about children gaining additional knowledge of their histories with Lifebook services, and it was found that children endorsed learning more about their birth families and why they were in foster care after the-intervention.

The fourth question involved children and foster parents/caregivers being able to talk about their histories and biological families. Results showed that most foster parent/caregivers began the study endorsing that they were comfortable, but they on average increased their comfort with talking to their children about their children's previous placements after the intervention. Children increased their comfort in talking about their biological families with foster parents/caregivers post-intervention.

The fifth and final question asked if children and foster parents/caregivers receiving Lifebook services were satisfied with these services, and the results indicated that the vast majority of parents and children were satisfied and would recommend the services to others. They also indicated that they felt their Lifebook Specialist listened to them.

The results show that the Lifebook services that LSSI provides utilizing Lifebook Specialists are valuable towards helping children and foster parents/caregivers learn more about the children's past

and biological families, aiding in the children's development of their personal narrative, a vital part of healing from the trauma of abuse and neglect. Lifebook Specialists appear to be a significant support in helping with the foster parents/caregivers' communication with children about their histories and family background, thus aiding the children in developing their identities. Children's functioning seems to improve in key areas, such as experiencing less stress, better attention skills, increased ability to relate to others, and improved social skills.