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Identifying Family Resource and Youth Services Employees Preparedness for Job Responsibilities and Service Offerings in Kentucky

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Identifying Family Resource and Youth Services Employees Preparedness for Job
Responsibilities and Service Offerings in Kentucky

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Identifying FRYSC Employees Preparedness

Family Resource and Youth Services Center (FRYSC) coordinators help at-risk students and their families obtain access to the necessary resources to overcome obstacles that affect their ability to learn. Although mandated to provide certain services, each FRYSC coordinator is also able to identify the unique needs of their student population and tailor some services specifically to the children and families in their school community. The current study looks at the educational levels, experience on the job and feelings of preparedness for their positions. Additionally, FRYSC coordinators were asked to provide insight as to which factors influence their job success.

KEY WORDS: Family resource centers; youth services centers; youth poverty; integrated services

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Background

Kentucky Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSC) were established with the introduction of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990. Kentucky FRYSC mission is “to help academically at-risk students succeed in school by helping to minimize or eliminate noncognitive barriers to learning” (Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, n.d). Administrative responsibility for FRYSCs is with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) rather than the Kentucky Department of Education. The expectation for these programs is to engage service providers, as well as connect human services and education (Denton, 2001). In response to growing social problems that formed barriers to learning and added additional demands on public service agencies, the Kentucky General Assembly created FRYSCs as a possible solution to help alleviate some of the stress (Division of Family Resource and Youth Services Center, 2016) .

Kentucky public schools are eligible for FRYSC programing if 20 percent or more of its students qualify for federal free and reduced-price meals (Denton, 2001). Currently in Kentucky, there are 823 FRYSCs serving 1,181 schools (95.78% of all KY schools) and around 626,696 students (Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, n.d). While eligibility for funding is based on the number of at-risk students, anyone living in the area the school serves may receive assistance (Denton, 2001). Legislation does, however, stipulate, "If resources are limited, students and families who are the most economically disadvantaged shall receive priority status for receiving services" (Denton, 2001, p. 2).

Family Resource Centers were established to serve elementary school students, whereas Youth Service Centers focus was on serving youth age 12 and older. The Family Resource Centers’ objectives include (at minimum): assistance with full-time child care for children ages

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two and three, assistance with after-school child care for children 4-12, health and education services for new and expectant parents, support and training for child day care providers, health services and/or referral to health services, education to enhance parenting skills, and education for preschool parents and their children (Roeder, 1992). Youth services centers were (at minimum) to address health services or referrals to health services, referral to social services, employment counseling, training and placement for youth, summer and part-time job development for youth, substance abuse services or referral to such services, and family crisis and mental health counseling or referral (Roeder, 1992). “Although FRYSCs provide some services directly, they concentrate mostly on giving families access to providers outside the Center, and work closely with state agencies to identify and effectively respond to gaps in the services” (Family Resource Coalition, 1993, p. 3).

The local advisory council guides the work of the FRYSC coordinator and is required to include parents, service providers, and educators. Kentucky Education Reform Act stated, “one-third of the members must be parents and no more than one-third can be educators” (Heine, 2001, p. 50). One final requirement was that the CHFS oversee the FRYSCs. Each center must have a full-time coordinator to implement the programs; however, the job qualifications were written to be very broad; “The coordinator is a critical ingredient in determining the success of a center, and it is crucial that this individual have the qualifications and characteristics necessary to implement the many responsibilities required of this position” (Denton, 2001, p. 4).

There are some training requirements for the FRYSC coordinator position. According to the FRYSC website, at the time of employment coordinators must complete twelve hours of new coordinator orientation and then twelve additional hours. Following the first year, coordinators are required to complete twenty-four hours annually. The FRYSC website states that all hours

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must fall with the FRYSC training domain topics and coordinators are encouraged to participate in a variety of domain topics. Approved training domain topics include center operations; leadership skills; social and emotional needs; educational system and academic needs; family development; and child/youth health and development needs.

FRYSCs have been in existence for 25 years and in testimonials from students, families and superintendents, it appears they have a positive impact in their communities (FRYSC 2016 Status Report: A Celebration of 25 years of service, 2016). The FRYSC programs have gained attention of national leaders such as the National Education Association, Communities in Schools, Center for Popular Democracy and the National Family Support Network, all of whom have made visits to observe the Centers and their work (FRYSC 2016 Status Report: A Celebration of 25 years of service, 2016). Yet, there is little literature exploring the characteristics of the FRYSC coordinators, their various roles and the importance of support from community partners. Our aim is to share information provided by FRYSC coordinators to begin the conversation about who they are and the services they provide.

Methods/Design

A 14-question survey was developed to assess components of the FRYSC job. Region, experience, education programming, referrals, community partners, engagement of school, job description, preparedness, and self-described successfulness were addressed. The Policy and Data Administrator from the Division of Family Resource Youth Center Coordinators distributed an email containing informed consent and a link to the survey. Completion of the survey indicated willingness to participate in the research study. At the time of survey, 823 Kentucky FRYSC coordinators received the email. All responses were recorded using the online survey tool Qualtrics, LLC.

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Analysis

Qualitative answers were analyzed using Atlas.ti. All quantitative measures were analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 23. Frequencies and descriptive were tabulated. ANOVA was calculated by region on quantitative questions. Significant ANOVAs were followed with Tukey's post-hoc test to determine significance.

Results

At the time of distribution 823 FRYSC coordinators were asked to participate, 314 (38%) chose to provide responses to some or all of the questions. In Kentucky there are eleven FRYSC regions and each region was represented in the survey responses. The eleven regions vary in size, ranging from region 3 which consists of only one county to regions 1 and 7 each consisting of 17 counties. In all regions but one, the counties boarder each other. Region 10 consists of two counties (see Table 1 for list of counties in regions) in eastern Kentucky and Fayette County in central Kentucky. Although the regions vary by the number of counties, upon analysis, the distribution of FRSYC coordinators was comparable to the distribution of respondents in our sample (see Table 1).

Requested information of the FRYSC coordinators included length of time in the position, current education level, and hours expected to work versus hours actually worked. The average length of time in the position was 11.68 years. Education levels varied from a high school diploma to some with a graduate degree. The largest percentage (49.7%) of respondents reported a bachelor's degree, followed by 29% with a master's degree and 13% with some college. Those with a high school diploma where the smallest percentage responding.

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Region	Counties in region	Number of Coordinators	Respondents by region
1	Fulton, Hickman, Carlisle, Ballard, McCracken, Graves, Calloway, Marshall, Livingston, Lyon, Trigg, Crittenden, Caldwell, Christian, Hopkins, Muhlenberg and Todd	77	25 (8%)
2	Union, Webster, Henderson, McLean, Daviess, Hancock, Ohio, Butler, Warren, Logan and Simpson	84	31 (9%)
3	Jefferson	96	28 (9%)
4	Oldham, Trimble, Henry, Carroll, Owen, Gallatin, Grant, Pendleton, Campbell, Kenton and Boone	71	34 (11%)
5	Shelby, Franklin, Scott, Harrison, Nicholas, Bourbon, Spencer, Anderson, Nelson, Washington, Marion, Woodford, Mercer and Jessamine	72	23 (7%)
6	Cumberland, Clinton, Wayne, McCreary, Russell, Pulaski, Casey, Taylor, Lincoln, Boyle, Garrard, Madison and Clark.	72	36 (12%)
7	Bracken, Robertson, Mason, Fleming, Lewis, Bath, Montgomery, Menifee, Rowan, Morgan, Elliott, Carter, Greenup, Boyd, Lawrence, Johnson and Martin	67	28 (9%)
8	Powell, Estill, Lee, Wolfe, Owsley, Breathitt, Magoffin, Leslie, Perry, Knott and Letcher	57	19 (6%)
9	Rockcastle, Jackson, Laurel, Clay, Whitley, Knox, Bell and Harlan	68	23 (7%)
10	Floyd, Pike and Fayette	72	28 (9%)
11	Meade, Breckinridge, Hardin, Bullitt, Larue, Hart, Edmonson, Allen, Barren, Grayson, Monroe, Metcalfe, Adair, and Green	77	37 (12%)
			n=312

Table 1: Counties per region, number of coordinators per region, respondents by region

Coordinators rely on support from within the school and their agency, as well as external sources in order to do their job successfully. The importance of these relationships was evident in several of the comments provided by FRYSC coordinators in their feedback to the question “What makes you feel successful?” Comments such as: “Collaborative relationships with community partners, and with families”, “My school support has been very helpful”, “My ability to bring partners together around common concerns enables me to mobilize our school and the

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broader community”, and many other similar responses showed the value of partnership to their feelings of success.

Respondents were asked to rate their feelings of support from within the schools, agencies, and external sources on a scale of 0 (unengaged and not supportive) and 100 (fully engaged and supportive). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if a difference exists between regions. The analysis revealed a significant difference between the regions respondents' feelings of support ($F(10,272)=2.448, p=.008$). Tukey post hoc analysis revealed region 7 (21.51, 95% CI [3.33, 39.69] and 9 (19.81, 95% CI [1.00, 38.62] felt significantly more support than respondents in region 3.

Initial thoughts were that social work or related fields would be the best fit for the job; however, the educational backgrounds are diverse and do not seem to impact feelings related to job preparedness or length of time on the job. In fact, those with a only a high school diploma reported higher adequately prepared responses (88.9%) than the other education levels, bachelors 73.7% and masters 72.9%. The percent of preparedness ranged from as low as 25% to as high as 100%, however analysis revealed no significant differences in preparedness by education level ($F(3,263)= 1.315, p=.270$). Regions 2 and 6 (see Table 1 for list of counties) reported high percentages of preparedness for the job in all education levels and when years of experience were looked at to determine if it could be a factor; no difference was noted there as well ($F(10,257)= .741, p=.685$). Mentoring, training or community supports could potentially be the difference in preparedness reported by these FRYSC coordinators in these regions.

Education and experience were the two items listed as most helpful (67.1%) in preparing coordinators for the job, long term mentoring was the third most beneficial. Those reporting they did not feel adequately prepared, noted more training and long term mentoring would have

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helped them to feel better prepared. By region, there is little difference in respondents' years of experience.

Community partnerships are also vital to the FRYSC coordinator as these are potential referral sources and resources for the coordinator when trying to meet the needs of children and families. According to the responses provided, over half (58.4%) of the referral sources for the FRYSCs were from inside the school system (teachers, students and staff/administration).

Parents and local agencies comprised the other two in the top five, with 78.7% of all responses falling in the top five category (see table 2). Lack of referrals from others sources could suggest an unawareness of others in the community of the resource or a lack of empathy by those that are aware of children and families in need however, do not feel obligated to refer for the service.

Staff/Administration	n=279
Teachers	n=182
Students	n=136
Local Agencies	n=107
Parents	n=100

Table 2: Referral Sources

Written job descriptions and hours worked above those required were two others areas information was requested. FRYSC coordinators in all regions reported working over the number of hours required of them weekly. The mean time FRYSC coordinators reported they are expected to work is 37.21 hours per week. The mean time FRYSC coordinators report working was 43.62. The amount of hours over what was expected ranged per region from 3.33 hours over at the low end and 9.44 hours at the high end. Those with high school diplomas only reported working over 7 hours more a week than expected but all education levels worked over by approximately 6 hours or more a week. One of the FRYSCs may have best summed up the

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willingness of the coordinators to work over the required hours when they said “...it is not just a ‘job’ to leave when the bell rings, but a lifetime commitment”.

Of those responding, 86% stated they had be provided with a written job description of what was expected of them in their position. As there are components of the job that are mandated these could be captured in a common job description for all FRYSC coordinators, however, the other job duties would vary based on the needs of that schools students and families. Written guidance on general expectations of the position could be beneficial especially for new FRYSC coordinators.

FRYSC coordinators were given a list of common programs provided by FRYSCs. Coordinators were asked to identify if their center provided those programs, if the program was needed but unfunded, or if a program that was provided but discontinued due to funding issues (see Table 3). The programs given included: clothing, backpack, snack, childcare, family link to services, summer camp, bringing agencies in to provide information or resources, parent education, coordinate mental health, coordinate health services, coordinate substance abuse education and counseling, family literacy, and career exploration. Of these, clothing programs, linking families to services, bringing agencies in to provide information or resources to families, backpack programs, and coordinating health services and referrals were the top five activities FRYSC coordinators listed as provided by their centers. The snack program was identified as most needed but not funded, followed by childcare programs, and parent education. Programs identified as once funded but discontinued due to budget issues were summer camp programs and childcare programs. FRYSC coordinators also identified programs other than those listed for all three of the categories.

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Program	Number of Centers offering	Programs needed but unfunded	Funded but went away due to budget
Clothing for children at school	285 (N=291)	3	3
Link Family to resources	284 (=285)	1	0
Bring outside agencies in to educate parents and children (health fairs, police, fire, etc.)	265 (=274)	5	4
Coordinate services for health and referrals	263 (=268)	3	2
Backpack Program to provide weekend food	247 (=272)	23	2
Coordinate services for mental health counseling	230 (=245)	14	1
Parent Education sessions	193 (=240)	36	11
Family Literacy services	176 (=192)	13	3
Coordinate services for substance abuse education and counseling	161 (=186)	23	2
Coordinate career exploration, summer and part-time job development for students.	146 (=178)	26	6
Summer day camp programs	141 (=212)	49	22
Snack Program for children who cannot afford	107 (=172)	58	7
Childcare after school	62 (=124)	49	13
Other	45 (=314)	14	19

Table 3: Programs and status

Limitations

In conducting this study, the primary obstacle was locating information related to the impact of FRYSCs on students and families. Information was available as to why FRYSCs were needed and how the centers were established; however, little research has been conducted related to their effectiveness. At the time of the search, 2008 was the most recent reports available on the FRYSC website and 2001 was the most update reviews of the programs impact.

The large number of FRYSC coordinators and number of schools they cover would have been a significant barrier had the FRYSC Director not been supportive of this project and assisted with ensuring the survey was sent to all coordinators. Additionally capturing an accurate picture of a FRYSC coordinator was difficult due to the all the varying factors related to their

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jobs. Children and families can benefit from a more comprehensive snapshot of the FRYSC as a whole by allowing coordinators to tailor programming to the needs of those they serve.

Conclusions

FRYSC coordinators offer supports to students and families at the basic needs level by assisting with clothing and food. They also assist in referrals for physical and mental health needs and provide education services not only for the youth but also for their parents. Initial follow up reports on the centers reported that they seemed to be performing well and the FRYSC data reports on their website, although outdated, show that the coordinators reach a large number of students and families each year.

The coordinator positions appear to be satisfying positions as the mean average time in the position for all that responded was over 11 years. With an overwhelming need for additional support due to a continued economic decline and our poor health ranking nationally, the FRYSC coordinators may be in the best position to reach our children and families and begin the process of helping them identify resources. Often it is having that one person or place to turn to that makes all the difference in the lives of others. As one FRYSC coordinator responded to the question of what makes them feel successful in their job, “When I see the smile on a child’s face after I’ve helped them. You know that smile, it is the smile of Hope!”

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