In August 2018, Good Shepherd Services launched a pilot fellowship with school-based programs to come together, learn from one another, and generate new ideas to try in their own contexts. Informed by methods of improvement science, fellows are part of a network that will help GSS get better at solving pressing problems. Fellows worked on the urgent problem of high rates of chronic absenteeism by generating and testing theories of improvement.

Key Improvement Questions:
1) Why are students chronically absent?
2) What can we do about it?
3) How will we know if our efforts are an improvement?

Lincoln YABC’s Theory of Change to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism

[ROOT CAUSE]
Students don’t come to school, in part, because of social anxiety and mental health issues.

[DRIVER]
Students need to feel connected to and supported by peers.

[CHANGE IDEA]
We will offer peer groups, facilitated by Advocate Counselors, focused on peer support, self-love, and self-care.

Plan
What’s your plan? What’s your prediction? How will you make it happen?

Lincoln launched four peer groups in Fall 2018: Sister Circle, Self-Love, Self-Care, Young Men’s Group. Peer groups were not a new strategy for Lincoln, but they approached them with clear intent and a plan to measure their impact. They predicted that students in peer groups would feel supported and connected – leading to better attendance.

Do
Execute Plan. Collect Data.

Students were recruited during a recruitment fair. Groups were held weekly for 60 minutes between dinner and an academic period. Fellows had difficulty accessing student-level attendance data in real-time. Students in each group were given a survey during group.

Act
Adopt, Adapt, or Abandon.

Unsurprisingly, the students who participated in groups had higher attendance. However, some students did not stick with the groups or choose to join them. Lincoln has interviewed some of the students to learn how groups, or other interventions, can meet their needs.

Study
Analyze the results and compare to predictions.

A reflection on the process and data showed that results were positive, with some outliers. Recruitment across groups was uneven and may lead to more student voice in recruitment. Data from surveys and attendance [see left] was in line with predictions.

Attendance Data
- Students in a group have more than double the average attendance of others students.
- Half of group participants are chronically absent, compared to 77% of others.
- Participants have similar attendance trends to those in no group (Sept-Nov below).

Takeaways from Fellowship
- Plan ahead
- Understand the challenges from students
- Be open to feedback – survey at the end of groups
- Have fun!