Enhancing Self-Determination

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Self-determined action to achieve personally valued goals
Powers et. al. (1996)


- Young people with high self-determination are more likely to be employed and live independently (Weymeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

- Young people transitioning from special education have shown increased educational outcomes through enhanced self-determination (Cobb et al., 2009).
BACKGROUND

• The majority of youth aging out of foster care desire to attend college (80%)

• Approximately 30-40% go on to enroll and attend

• Many face a plethora of barriers and challenges and 6-8% graduate from a 2 or 4 year school

• Self-determination is a key facilitator of educational persistence and success
## Previous Studies

<table>
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<th>MY LIFE</th>
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<th>BETTER FUTURES</th>
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</table>
| • 12 months professional coaching + workshops  
  • Transition aged youth in FC and SPED, ages 16.5-18 (expanded to Gen Ed in current study)  
  • Outcomes:  
    • high-school completion  
    • transition planning  
    • self-determination  
    • quality of life  
    • employment rates. | • 9 months professional coaching + workshops  
  • Sophomore/Juniors in SPED and FC  
  • Outcomes:  
    • educational planning  
    • self-determination  
    • school performance  
    • reduced anxiety/depression | • Summer Institute + 9 months near-peer coaching + workshops  
  • Last yr HS students in FC and w/ MH stressors  
  • Outcomes:  
    • college enrollment doubled for tx youth (73% vs. 36%)  
    • college prep  
    • self-determination  
    • hope  
    • MH empowerment |
WHERE WE’VE BEEN & WHERE WE’RE GOING

RESEARCH & TRAINING CENTER FOR PATHWAYS TO POSITIVE FUTURES

COMMUNITY ML PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

ML CERTIFICATION

THRIVE

RESEARCH PROJECTS
CURRENT PROJECT

• Promote engagement and retention of first year PSU students who:

  • have experience in foster care
  • experience mental health stressors

- Near-peer Coaching
- FUTURES College Success Class
- Workshops
- Campus Champions
FACTORS TO CONSIDER

• About 60% of youth aging out of care receive special education services (Schmidt et al, 2013; Hill, 2013)

• If you count DSM diagnoses, percentage of those who experience a disability increases to 70%

• 25% of youth gaining out of care receive developmental disability services vs. 2% in general pop.

• Cultural considerations important to consider around mental health stressors and other disability labels
- Focus is on “protecting and fixing” youth in care and youth with disabilities

- As a result, many youth face restriction that further limits opportunities for self-determined behavior and practicing life skills (Schmidt et al, 2013)

- Youth in care with disability labels experience a double or triple whammy (if AA or NA) of poor outcomes (Geenen and Powers, 2006)

- Important to consider the complex environmental context within which these labels are given
  - (ie: trauma, instability, poverty, lack of advocacy, institutional racism, stigma around FC, grief and loss etc)
“Stigma literally means being marked or branded, but it refers to a group of people, in this instance, young people with mental health problems, being categorized as being different from the social norm, and being shunned and devalued. As a result of this, mental health is associated with negative connotations, so people do not want to admit to having mental health problems” (YoungMinds, 2010).
“The stigma of having a mental health problem can have a more profound impact than the mental health problem itself.”
(Hinshaw, 2005)

“A diagnostic label can be empowering, but it can also mark people out as different. This can result in people being defined by their diagnosis, rather than who they actually are.”
(Corrigan, 2010)

“People with mental health problems are known to experience more stigma than those with other health problems.”
(Gale, 2006)
Mental Health and College

Among ALL college students:

- Two out of three women and two out of five men have high levels of anxiety while in college. **TRUE or FALSE?**

- One out of three women and one out of four men report depression while in college. **TRUE or FALSE?**

- Between one-quarter and one-third of students in college have emotional difficulties that could be diagnosed as a mental health condition. **TRUE or FALSE?**
YOUTH-LED PHILOSOPHY

- Nothing about us, without us!

- Work through the students, not around them

- Respect individual differences in learning and maturity

- Help youth learn how to direct support

- Keep communication open and positive

- Recognize student-initiated goals and support them

- Interpret lack of follow-through as a need for more support
DREAMING & SETTING GOALS
YOUTH PERSPECTIVE: GOALS

• Helpful to write down the goal

• Breaking the goal down into steps helped the goal seem more manageable

• I used to not do anything to work towards goals before writing them down.

• My next goal is to be a semi-pro martial arts fighter.
DREAM WHEEL ACTIVITY

PEOPLE
- What will my teachers/professors be like?
- What kind of environment is it (conservative, liberal, party people, serious)?
- Who will be my adult supporters or allies? What will they do?
- What other kinds of support or accommodations will I need to get through school (i.e.: financial, tutoring, technical, personal)?

PLACES
- What type of school will I attend (public/private, community, technical/four-year college or trade school)?
- What will my school look like? How big is it? How are my classes structured?
- Where will the school I attend be located? Will it be close to home or far away; in a city or in the country?
- Where will I live and how will I get to and around campus?

ACTIVITIES
- What will I want to learn? What courses will I take? Work toward what kind of diploma or degree?
- What other things will I do at school (clubs, extracurricular activities, sports, yearbook, student government)?
- What skills will I need to use (i.e.: cleaning my dorm room, computers, writing papers, making appointments)?

EDUCATION

How does this dream match my values, talents, and preferences?
SETTING GOALS EXAMPLE

ROLE PLAY

• Coach and youth will demonstrate setting goals together
NARROW DOWN ACTIVITY

MY GOAL

Narrow it down by
filling in the details
till you get to

THE ACTIVITIES YOU WANT TO DO
THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLIES
YOUTH PERSPECTIVE: ALLIES

• People who help me out along the way.

• Important because everyone needs help once in awhile.

• My dad is my ally and lets me live with him to support me while I work to save up.

• Times when I was angry called people I trust and my coach to calm me down.
BEING AN ALLY

- Nothing about the youth without the youth
- Listen
- Let go of your agenda
- Be mindful of using labels that youth don’t identify with
- Help young people gain insight into important life areas such as finances, employment, healthcare, transportation, and relationships, among others.
FIRST, write down the names of people (first name or initials only) who have supported you in the last year and draw a line between your name and theirs.

NEXT, draw a line between any two people in your network that also know each other.

LASTLY, use a color to highlight the people that usually support you at least once a month. We want to know who in your network regularly provides support.
YOUTH VOICE

https://vimeo.com/37129686
Being self-determined in my educational path was important to me because...

- I didn’t want to live paycheck to paycheck.
- I decided to go to Job Corps after trying minimum wage jobs.
- I finished my education through Job Corps to improve my future.
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QUESTIONS?

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