CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?: STRATEGIES, TOOLS & RESOURCES TO ENHANCE YOUNG ADULT VOICE IN RESEARCH

Amanda Costa

UMass Medical School, Worcester MA, USA
• Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research (ACR)
• Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center
Acknowledgements

Our mission is to promote the full participation in socially valued roles of transition-age youth and young adults (ages 14-30) with serious mental health conditions. We use the tools of research and knowledge translation in partnership with this at risk population to achieve this mission. Visit us at:

http://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsRTC

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Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research

- A sub-center of the Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center (SPARC) within UMass Medical School
- One of two federally-funded Centers in the US focused on Young Adults with lived experience—focus on areas of school and work
- 3 distinct arms:
  - Research
  - Knowledge Translation & Dissemination
  - Technical Assistance
Participatory Action Research (PAR)

• Conducting research in partnership with people/the community and not "about" or "for" them.

• Collaboration throughout research process:
  - Developing research questions
  - Writing grant proposals
  - Recruitment
  - Collecting and analyzing data
  - Writing up & disseminating findings
Why We Believe in Young Adult PAR?

- **Recognizing Unique:** needs, goals, values that are distinct from adolescents and older adults.
- **Enhanced Young Adult focus:** Ensures services are YA friendly and culturally appropriate.
- **Increased engagement:** YA are more engaged (higher retention) and committed (lower premature dropout) to services they have an active voice in.
- **Pathway to:**
  - Better quality of care
  - Greater cost efficiency
  - Improved population health
PAR: MAKING IT WORK ON THE GROUND
Our 3 Ps of Participatory Action Research with Young Adults

- Prioritize
- Plan
- be Purposeful
Prioritize

PAR and Young Adult Culture
SPARC PAR Initiative

- **Vision** - To lead the mental health research community to work in partnership with young adults with lived mental health experience
- **Buy-in** – Supported by Center leaders, vetted with our research Centers
- **Leadership** - Faculty/young adult co-leadership
- **Financial resource allocation** – i.e. youth advisory boards
- **Tasks** - Develop & deliver tools, resources, and technical assistance to support researchers to do YA PAR
Employ YA as Researchers

• **Hired & Trained 8** Young Adults with lived mental health experience

• **Leadership & Growth Opportunities**
  • Leading research studies
  • Leading Center-wide initiatives (e.g., PAR Initiative, social media efforts)
  • Lead Center-wide trainings (e.g., interviewer training)
Find the Right “Fit”

Young Adults want to be matched with jobs that fit with their skill sets and disposition.5

- Design strengths based roles and tailor workload to individual preferences/needs
- “Honest conversations” occur when mismatches happen.
- Roles delineate between skills needed upon arrival vs. skills developed during employment
Encourage social wellness

Ongoing opportunities for socialization and orientation to a job are important for a smooth emotional transition for young adults.⁶

- Personalizing the onboarding process
- Encourage daily social activities (i.e. group lunch, team walks, utilizing “Chillax” space)
- Provide “lunch and learn” series to socialize and familiarize with history of the Transitions RTC/SPARC
YA need soft skills training on: assimilating to work culture, working with others setting long term career goals, etc.\textsuperscript{7}

What Can We Do?

- Give it TIME!
- Prioritize professional development
- Weekly supervision, bi-annual goal review
- Identify free courses on time management, working with others, communicating effectively, etc.
Consider non-traditional supervision structures

Supervisors need to embrace flexibility and integrate modern approaches in their supervision styles

- Encourage flexible schedules
- Ongoing discussion about informal accommodations
- Disclosure is an ongoing topic
- Matching supervisor/mentee personalities
- Job Coach supplements to Supervisor role
Plan
Plan to do PAR

Participatory Action Research Planning Tool

Instructions: This tool is intended to support your team to implement Participatory Action Research (PAR) methods and principles into your research and dissemination activities. This tool is most successful when it is completed collaboratively with input from all members of the team.

Overview of Baseline Snapshot of Research Study

Step 1: Title of Research Project: ____________________________________________

Step 2: Identify Project Team Members: _______________________________________

Step 3: Have you purposefully included a young adult(s) on your team that has lived mental health expertise who has agreed to explicitly share their lived experience as part of their work?

- Yes, we have a team member who will disclose outwardly (i.e., both in their research work and in the community through presentations and publications)
- Yes, we have a team member who will disclose behind the scenes (i.e., utilize lived experience in their research activities but NOT out to the community)
- NO
- Other: ______________________

Step 4: Required Resources - What support do you need to successfully partner with young adults with lived experience in this study:

- Ongoing consultation from PAR Experts
- Access to an existing advisory council
- Written training tools/resources to help keep on top of PAR efforts throughout the project
- Funding to support staff with lived mental health experience
  - Quarterly check-ins with PAR Experts

The Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research
Recognize PAR may look different at different points in time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research – Levels of YA Involvement</th>
<th>1. No YA</th>
<th>2. YA Informed</th>
<th>3. YA Involvement</th>
<th>4. YA Partnership</th>
<th>5. YA Ownership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YA not asked for their voice; no perceived value to YA voice</td>
<td>Sporadic YA voice; often one-off consultation; feedback may be very targeted</td>
<td>Non-YA directed; consistent engagement of YA; YA voice not given equal weight</td>
<td>YA or non-YA initiated; YA participate in all important activities in significant ways; both voices may not have equal weight</td>
<td>YA initiated; YA voice valued and highlighted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power/Decision Making</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Very Often/Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YA/Non-YA Power</td>
<td>0/100</td>
<td>0/100</td>
<td>30/70</td>
<td>50/50</td>
<td>70/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dose of Involvement</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Rarely/sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes/Very Often</td>
<td>Very Often/Always</td>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Defining the problem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No YA involvement</th>
<th>Minimally Active</th>
<th>Somewhat Active</th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Very Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Defining the problem</td>
<td></td>
<td>may be asked to suggest topics via advisory board or one time consultation</td>
<td>May have more regular involvement, to develop and refine topics, but not necessarily YA led</td>
<td>YA leading/co-leading topic creation, voice of YA and non-YA are both valued</td>
<td>YA owning and leading developing topics with consultation from non-YA advisors/partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Designing methodologies and data collection measures/strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No YA involvement</th>
<th>Inconsistent</th>
<th>Consistent YA voice</th>
<th>Consistent YA partnership and voice</th>
<th>YA Lead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(b) Designing methodologies and data collection measures/strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>may provide targeted edits on recruitment methods or collection instruments (i.e. surveys)</td>
<td>Will review ongoing drafts of methods and consult on data collection measures, not given ultimate</td>
<td>Will partner with researcher to determine ultimate methodologies and co-</td>
<td>Leading identification of audience and key messaging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
be Purposeful
Be purposeful in your PAR

- Conducting systematic review of how PAR methods are described in the literature
- Drafted PAR assessment implementation tool
- Testing with current research teams within SPARC
Documenting Methods

- Implementing a “PAR” to-do list
- Standing “PAR activities” agenda item for team meetings
- All publications describe par methodology
- Quarterly team review of PAR Implementation toolkit
THINGS TO DO:

- “PAR Champion” designated to ensure ongoing focus on PAR
- PAR Consultant w/ expertise in PAR guides team regularly
- Hired research staff will share lived experience during internal team activities
- Members of advisory council of YA with lived experience provide ongoing feedback
3 Key Takeaways
PAR is successful when:

1. It’s prioritized, planned and purposeful
2. You plan the *right* PAR for the *right* project
3. Both Young Adults and other researchers
   - Recognize and prioritize PAR
   - Value open communication about what is/isn’t working
   - Have the **skills** and **tools** they need to do PAR authentically
Thank You!

Contact me at: Amanda.Costa@Umassmed.edu

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References


