THE COLLEGE YEARS:
How Students with Lived Experience Navigate Academics & Mental Health Management

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The Learning & Working Center at Transitions RTC is a national effort that aims to improve the supports for youth and young adults, ages 14-30, with serious mental health conditions to successfully complete their schooling and training and move into rewarding work lives. We are located at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA, Department of Psychiatry, Systems & Psychosocial Advances Research Center. Visit us at:

http://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR

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PASS Overview
Mental Health in Higher Education

• Roughly 1/3 of undergraduates have clinically significant symptoms of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.¹

• Students with mental health conditions who attend college experience high dropout rates – one of the highest of any disability group.²

• Positive mental health is strongly correlated to academic success, retention, and ultimately vocational success, adult resiliency & Return on Investment.³
Peer Academic Support for Success (PASS)

The PASS Program:
an empirically supported peer coach intervention to help students with MHC succeed academically
PASS Phases

Phase 1

Phase 2

Phase 3

Phase 4
QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

College students with MHC, faculty, Disability Services staff, Counseling Center staff
Qualitative Interviews

1-hour interviews covered experiences working with or being YA students with MHC, and unique challenges and facilitators to academic success

Participating Sites:
- Boston University
- UMass Boston
- Wright State University

Interview Participants:
- College Students (N=24)
- Faculty (N=21)
- Counseling Center Staff (N=8)
- Disability Center Staff (N=9)
Participant Demographics

**College Students**
- Primarily female (83%), white (54%), upperclassman (54%)
- 50% transferred
- 75% currently in outpatient therapy

**Disability Services Staff**
- Primarily female (89%), white (78%)
- 67% in current position ≤2 years

**Faculty**
- Primarily female (67%), white (95%)
- Experience in academia:
  - 10-20 years (43%)
  - 20+ years (57%)

**Counseling Staff**
- Primarily white (87.5%), female (87.5%)
- 75% were in their current position ≤5 years
Qualitative Coding

- Developed preliminary themes
- Identified concrete codes
- Developed coding manual

- 3 staff coding with Dedoose
  - Primary and secondary coders
  - Interrater Reliability at 80% or higher
Every student is unique, but there are some commonly faced challenges.

- Anxiety
- Stress coping skills
- Time management
- Chronic absenteeism

“...my art class recently they went to the art museum and I just like was not into it...like I just get anxiety just getting lost, I’ve never been there...I don’t have any friends to meet up with in that class. I didn’t even go. I was like, ‘I cannot do this.” - Student
There are differing perspectives amongst faculty on how to best support students.

“Unless it’s documented, I’m all about equity. If you get one more day, everybody gets one more day, ... I’m willing to extend their deadline but it doesn’t come free; there’s a penalty at some point.”

“Like I said, I’ve not had students who were trying to get out of work, they’re just not... they just need help getting it done, you know? And, you know it’s usually crunch time, you know, and usually they’ve got three exams plus two papers or four papers, so I can just give them a little extra time.”
Confidentiality laws block communication between faculty and on campus services.

“…I know there that there is a lot of confidentiality issues, but just to know that the student is showing up on an ongoing basis… I don’t know if that’s even allowed to be divulged, but just to know that so-and-so has contacted us…” - Faculty
Students are hesitant to access services and accommodations.

“...I think it can be difficult. And I think for a student that is already having mental health issues. Or you know is reticent around disclosing because of concerns around stigma or whatever....I think the university probably could find a way to be more welcoming. To be less bureaucratic.” – Faculty

- Discrimination (stigma)
- Bureaucracy/required paperwork
- Preference for informal accommodations over formal accommodations
For students who use services, they quickly learned they are very under-resourced.

“I mean first of all, if the initial appointment you make with someone is like ‘I’m sorry but like after this...I really don’t think I can see you after, you know, two months like that would be helpful if they could just...be there for a prolonged period of time” - Student
Staff voiced similar concerns with resource shortages as a barrier to serving students.

We haven’t [promoted services] because if we did you know… I already have a waiting list of 17-20 people so it’s just…it would be too much to promote it.”- ODS Staff

Every year we have a wait list that starts in October and runs through the end of the semester, so- winter semester- that’s the biggest issues. If you can’t get the help you need, I think that then undermines people’s ability to be able to have the energy to focus on academic work.”- Counseling Staff
Main Take-A-Way’s

- **College students with MHC:**
  - Struggle to navigate the academic demands of college
  - Aren’t often accessing on campus services (e.g., ODS)
  - On campus services lack the resources to meet these students’ needs.

- **Faculty & Staff:**
  - Have mixed beliefs on appropriate levels of support for students with MHC
  - Face barriers when communicating with on campus supports (i.e., confidentiality)
  - Many resource shortages impact faculty/staff ability to support students effectively
The PASS Model
Inspiration for PASS Model

• Phase 1 qualitative interviews

• Two pre-existing college coaching models:

  1. Wright State University’s Raiders on the Autism Spectrum Excelling (RASE) program for students on the Autism Spectrum

  2. Boston University’s college coaching model for students with mental health conditions
Peer Coaching Structure

• Coaches
  • Upperclassmen at Boston University
  • Academically successful and thriving on-campus

• Students
  • Undergraduates at Boston University
  • Mental health conditions
  • Academic impairments

• Coaching Structure
  • 1x/week in person coaching session
  • Up to 4 hours of coaching/week
Student-Peer Coach Meeting Agenda

1. Rapport Building
2. Logistics/ House-keeping
3. Discussion of Topic
4. Action Activity
5. Review of Student & Coach Tasks for Next Week
6. Final Thoughts or Concerns
PASS Core Competencies

- Structure
- Technology
- Emotional Agility
- Advocacy
- Resiliency
PASS Peer Coach Manual

Topics include:
- Peer support approach
- Supported education
- Responding with empathy
- Motivational Interviewing
- Crisis response and suicide prevention
- Reasonable Accommodations
- Peer coach self-care
Tools & Tip Sheets
# Coaching Principles & Ethics

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<th>Principles</th>
<th>Ethics</th>
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<td>Wellness-oriented</td>
<td>Promote ethical behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person-centered</td>
<td>Practice responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship-focused</td>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengths-based</td>
<td>Individualization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Supervision</td>
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Peer Coach Training & Supervision

Peer Coach Supervisor with extensive college mental health coaching experience provides training and ongoing supervision.

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<tr>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Group Supervision</th>
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<tr>
<td>Webinars</td>
<td>Weekly (1 hour)</td>
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<td>In-person trainings</td>
<td>Practice peer coaching skills</td>
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<td>Total of 12 hours</td>
<td>Mutual support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Learning opportunities</td>
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ASSESSING IMPACT & FIDELITY
PASS Short & Long-Term Outcomes

- Short-term outcomes - STEAR Competencies
- Long-term outcomes
  - Improved GPA
  - Increased graduation rates
  - Increased retention rates
  - Increasing general self-efficacy
  - Increased self-determination
  - Decreased internalized stigma
  - Improved relationships with faculty over time
Assessing Impact And Fidelity

**Impact**
- Web surveys (3/year)
  - E.g., resiliency, self-efficacy
- Academic records
- GPA
- Retention

**Fidelity**
- Peer coaching weekly logs
- Supervision logs
- Student/Coach focus groups
- Peer coach-self evaluation
- Student evaluation of peer coaching
Current Activities

- Currently recruiting 50 students at Boston University for pilot RCT
  - 25 experimental group – receiving PASS peer coaching
  - 25 control group – receiving “enhanced services as usual” via a campus resource packet
Transitions ACR Tip Sheets

• **Tools for School:**
  Accommodations for College Students with Mental Health Challenges

• **Outside-the-Box Accommodations:**
  Real Support for Real Students

• **My Mental Health Rights on Campus**
Interested in PASS?! Contact us!

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Thank You!

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