ON OUR WAY TO THE TOP
ADVOCATING FOR AN ENVIRONMENT OF ACCEPTANCE AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

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The Learning and Working During the Transition to Adulthood Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
The Transitions RTC aims to improve the supports for youth and young adults, ages 14-30, with serious mental health conditions who are trying 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 and Psychosocial Advances Research and Training Center (SPARC).

Visit us at: [http://labs.umassmed.edu/transitionsRTC/index.htm](http://labs.umassmed.edu/transitionsRTC/index.htm)

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Overview

“On Our Way to the Top” is about ways young adults in recovery can take initiative to create a work environment that promotes inclusion and acceptance of employees with lived experience and is conducive to empowerment and recovery.

I. Why Focus on Young Adults?

II. The Experiences of YA Employees at the Transitions RTC: Participatory Action Research (PAR)

III. Lessons We’ve Learned: Advocating for Yourself in the Workplace

I. Discussion
Objectives

We hope that by the end of this presentation, you will be able to...

1. Define Participatory Action Research (PAR) and become a leader in the PAR-like work environment.

2. Advocate for your needs and bring positive change in your workplace.

3. Know resources that can help you be the best employee you can be.
WHY FOCUS ON YOUNG ADULTS?
The Challenge in Employment

• Young adults with mental health conditions have lower employment rates compared to same age peers’ with other health concerns. (Frank, 1991; Neel, 1988; Newman et al., 2011; Vander Stoep et al., 2000)

• Young adults are less often employed than mature adults with mental health conditions. (Waghorn, Chant, & Harris, 2009).

• Career efforts during young adulthood predict later career success. (De Vos, De Clippeleer, & Dewilde, 2009).
Desires for Employment

Qualitative study of young adults in standard adult vocational support programs

• Major desires:
  1. Career exploration, job preparation, and effective educational supports
  2. Social skills training
  3. Supportive provider relationships and readily available workplace supports that don’t involve provider staff

Torres-Stone, R., Delman, J., McKay, C., & Smith, L. (Under revision). Appealing features of vocational support services for hispanic and non hispanic transition age youth and young adults with serious mental health conditions. Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research
What Employment Does for Young Adults with Lived Experience

Routine | Experience | Motivation | Recovery

Learning | Purpose | Confidence
THE EXPERIENCES OF YA EMPLOYEES IN PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)
Challenges and Solutions

**Employer Experiences**

- Top-down commitment by ensuring involvement
- Understanding youth culture by thinking outside the box, empowering and assigning tasks based on strengths
- Mentoring and giving clear guidelines for professional development

**YA Employee Experiences**

- Ensure commitment and involvement through peer support and self-advocacy
- Become self-aware by reading, receiving peer support, and voicing concerns
- Develop professionally by requesting supports and taking initiative
PAR at the RTC: Trial and Error

Breaking New Ground (Yrs 1-3)

- 5 Per-diem YA positions
- Generalized job description
- Separate YA meetings
- Supervisor = main support
- No MH management training

Steering towards Success (Yrs 3-now)

- PAR staff on career trajectories
- Strengths based job descriptions
- Culture Shift
- Career Coach
- National Youth Voice
Continuum of Youth Involvement

**Ad Hoc Input**
Environment where young people can contribute ideas/information about their needs

**Influence**
Formal structured input in order to ensure at least a minimal influence on the organization

**Structured Consultation**
Deliberately develop a strategy to seek young people’s opinions about what they need, what problems they face or what strategies to employ

**Delegation**
Real responsibility for undertaking particular tasks of the organization

**Negotiation**
Young people and rest of organization each contribute their ideas, information and perspectives and decisions are reached by compromise

**Control**
Young people make many or all of crucial decisions within the organization, from policy, programming, financial management, hiring and firing of staff

1987, Gill Westhorp of the Youth Sector Training Council
Hart’s Ladder

Key Questions

Which level of Hart’s Ladder is our project on?
Which level of Hart’s Ladder should our project be on?
What do we need to do to move to the right level on the ladder for our project?

Quality of Participation

- Young people and adults share decision-making
  - Young people have the ideas, set up the project and invite adults to join them in making decisions throughout the project. They are equal partners.
  - Young people decide they need a one-stop shop in their community. They partner with adults in different youth organisations and together lobby the government for resources.

- Young people lead and initiate action
  - Young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available and trust in the leadership of young people.
  - A group of students get permission from their principal to run an environmental day. The students make the decisions, and the school provides support.

- Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
  - Adults have the initial idea, and young people are involved in making decisions, planning and implementing the project.
  - A community co-ordinator asks young people for event ideas for Youth Week. The young people suggest having a skating event. The co-ordinator and young people work together to make decisions and apply for funding.

- Young people are consulted and informed
  - Adults design and facilitate the project, and young people’s opinions are given weight in decision-making. Young people receive feedback about their opinions.
  - A local council runs several consultations to get young people’s input about a recreation park. Young people tell the council about features in the park they want changed. The council provides feedback to the young people about how their views affected decision-making.

- Young people assigned but informed
  - Adults decide on the project and young people volunteer for it. Young people understand the project and adults respect their views.
  - A conference creates positions for two young people on a panel of speakers. Young people decide how to select their representatives and work with adults to understand their role.

Non-Participation

- Tokenism
  - Young people are given a limited voice and little choice about what they can say and how they can communicate.
  - A young person is asked by adults to be on a panel and represent ‘youth’. The young person is not given the opportunity to consult with peers or understand the role.

- Decoration
  - Young people take part in an event in a very limited capacity and have no role in decision-making.
  - A group of young people are given a script by adults about ‘youth problems’ to present to adults attending a youth conference.

- Manipulation
  - Adults have complete and unchallenged authority and abuse their power. They use young people’s ideas and voices for their own gain.
  - A publication uses young people’s cartoons; however, the publication is written by adults.

Source: http://www.connecttransmit.org.uk/working-with-young-people/
PAR Levels of Involvement

- **Level 4**
  - Youth Led
- **Level 3**
  - Youth Partnered
- **Level 2**
  - Youth Involved
- **Level 1**
  - Youth Informed
LESSONS WE’VE LEARNED: ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF IN THE WORKPLACE
FIRST THINGS FIRST:
WHAT TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE GETTING A JOB
Things to think about before getting a job

• Are you ready to work?
• Do you have a plan to manage your mental health? (i.e. WRAP plan)
• Are you comfortable disclosing your mental health condition?
• Would you have reliable transportation to and from your job?
Things to think about when applying to a job!

- Find out what you need to know walking in the door/can learn on the job/provide training as needed
- Does this position offer conditions that are supportive to your growth and mental wellness?
- What is this job’s policy on...

  - cell phone use
  - dress code
  - probation period
  - time off
  - workplace relationships
  - harassment
  - social media sites
  - raises
  - overtime
  - breaks
  - trainings
IF YOU COULD STOP POSTING "ENTRY LEVEL" POSITIONS THAT REQUIRE 3-5 YEARS EXPERIENCE

THAT'D BE GREAT

…but sad reality 😞
Paid Work vs. Unpaid Advisory Roles

Unpaid work can be a great way to build your resume, but don’t be afraid to advocate for payment if you think your work deserves it!

- Young adults feel appreciated for time, effort, dedication, and expertise
- Provides equality with adult coworkers
- Not all YAs can afford to work for free
- Motivates young adults to do great work
- Young adults feel they have a stake in the workplace
- Creates a career ladder vs. stagnant positions
ON THE JOB:
ADVOCATING FOR YOUR NEEDS AND RIGHTS
Flex your Self-Advocacy Skills on the Job!

- Self advocacy is the ability to speak up for yourself and for the things that are important to you. As you become older and take on more responsibilities in your life, self advocacy helps you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Get what you need</th>
<th>Make your own choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learn to say no</td>
<td>Express your feelings respectfully</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- **You can use your self advocacy skills at work by....**
  - Adjusting your schedule
  - Participating in meetings
  - Asking for accommodations
  - Requesting tutoring
  - During a job interview
  - Asking for a raise

  **Example:**
  “I can’t work on Sunday, I have a family commitment. Can I work a different shift instead?”
Self Advocacy at Work: Questions to Ask Yourself!

- What am I advocating for? What do I want?
- Why is it important?
- How should I make my request?
- Who do I need to talk to?
- Who else will this affect?
- Is there a compromise or another option?
- What should I do if my request is denied?
Self Advocacy at Work: Strategies for Success

• Ask questions.
• Listen! Be interested in what the other person is saying.
• Think before you speak. People listen when you choose your words carefully.
• Write down your thoughts and/or rehearse what you will say.
• Know your audience and tone that they would find respectful.
• Know when to stop talking and how to exit a conversation politely.
• Be willing to compromise and be flexible.
• Using words like “please” and “thank you” go a long way.
• Do your research. Find out if what you’re asking for is reasonable.
Transitions RTC Tip Sheet: “How to Speak Up and Be Heard: Self Advocacy”
Reasonable Accommodations

• Many individuals disclose that they have a disability in order to receive accommodations in the workplace
• Can be mandated by law
• SHOULD be implemented regardless!
• Definition of accommodation: A modification or adjustment to the work environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables a qualified person with a disability:
  - to perform the essential functions of that position.
  - to enjoy the same privileges and benefits of employment as are enjoyed by employees without disabilities
Common Work Accommodations

- Cost-effective process (short term pain for long term gain!)
- Formal vs. informal process
- Individualize, individualize, individualize!
- Commonly provided in workplace:
  - Flexibility in work schedule
  - Productivity/organizational resources
  - Working from home
  - Headphones/Music to block distractions
  - Quiet workplace/access to private office
  - Frequent Breaks
  - JOB COACH!
Accommodations cont’d

Bring in experts on accommodation process (i.e. ADA, askjan.org)

• Ask for written resources & guidance
• YAs can ask for review of request from time to time
“Do I Tell My Boss? Disclosing My Mental Health Condition at Work”
Transitions RTC Tip Sheet
Do I tell my boss? Disclosing a mental health condition at work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some Reasons to Disclose Having a Mental Health Condition on the Job:</th>
<th>Some Reasons Not to Disclose Having a Mental Health Condition on the Job:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• To obtain protection under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)¹</td>
<td>• There is no need for accommodations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Required in order to request job accommodations²</td>
<td>• Hiring or promotion chances may be negatively affected due to stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To serve as a role model and educate others</td>
<td>• To protect your privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reduces stigma</td>
<td>• Fear of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relieves the stress some may feel about “hiding” a disability</td>
<td>- Negative employer or coworker reactions to you or your work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Makes employers better able to respond to sudden symptoms or hospitalizations</td>
<td>- People not respecting your privacy and confidentiality (others in community/workplace will be told)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Disclosure to a supervisor is kept confidential by law</td>
<td>- Being held to a different standard, i.e., less will be expected of you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I want to disclose – how should I go about it?

• **You have the right to disclose at any point**

• Steer clear of medical terms and diagnoses – instead share how your disability affects you at work in a positive way (“I have a disability that affects my concentration. I really benefit from frequent breaks in order to stay productive.”)

• You will be asked whether you have a disability and the extent of the disability

• Focus on your abilities, not disabilities! You can give examples of how your experiences with a disability will positively affect your work performance

• Prepare and practice what you will say ahead of time

• Have a written statement or list prepared

…**but you don’t have to!**
KEEPING THE JOB:
HOW TO MANEUVER RELATIONSHIPS AND DIFFICULTIES
Succeeding at Work! The Basics

- Keep track of your work schedule – have a copy!
- Arrive on time – plan ahead for transportation
- Know your job description – know your tasks, ask if you have any questions about your position

- **SELF CARE** is important! Live a healthy lifestyle outside of work…
  - Get enough sleep
  - Eat well
  - Make time for activities and people that make you happy!
Advocating with your supervisor

• Supervision is time you spend one-on-one with your boss at work. Tips for success are…
  • Use this time to ask questions – there are no dumb questions!
  • Use this time to ask for help (prioritizing tasks, conflicts with coworkers, etc.)
  • Ask them what you are doing well and what you could work to improve – then take this feedback and apply it to your work!
  • Know your job description – know your tasks, ask if you have any questions about your position

• If your boss does not schedule a regular meeting with you but you think that would be helpful – ask her or him for a meeting every week or two
Supervision Considerations

A parallel learning trajectory:
Some young adults with serious mental health conditions are simultaneously learning to live with their mental health condition while also navigating a professional work environment for the first time.

http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/fpS1310.pdf

Potentially effective supervision practices:
- Basic understanding of the mental health condition and how it affects work
- Reasonable accommodations negotiated
- Individualized and strength-based approach to supervision
- Make supervision a priority
A Delicate Balance: Supervision vs. Clinical Support

Supervisors should:

- Help manage tasks, priorities, and ensure the work gets done
- Provide a supportive environment but not provide what could be considered clinical care
- Know about an individual’s mental health supports and encourage effective use of those supports in times of need OR collaborate with a separate employee in the organization that is tasked with providing that support (if the individual has disclosed).
Consider Career Coaching?

Supervisors may have a natural discomfort with mentoring while managing tasks since the interest of those two roles may clash.

Management and Support

Two positions should exist that support young adults in their work:
1. A Support Staff, and
2. 2. A Management Role.

“While management roles demand a focus on group productivity, the support role focuses on the needs of individual members”

~ The PAR Handbook by Danley and Ellison
When We Considered Career Coaching

An additional person whose role is to provide support in professional development and mental health management. This role should be filled by a non-RTC employee as the person should be someone who the PAR staff have not already established a relationship with and therefore does not reflect a supervisor role.

**Job description**

The job coach would provide support on a weekly basis. Confidentiality – does not report to supervision about conversations with PAR staff unless:
- The staff member has approved the discussion.
- The staff member is unsafe.
- The staff member and job coach have decided to terminate further work.

Has knowledge of mental health.

Helps developing skills regarding:
- Managing mental health in the workplace.
- Requesting accommodations or other actions of self-advocacy.
- Building self-efficacy.
- On-the-job training.
- Professional development.
- Conflict resolution.

Provide group training for resolving issues or acquiring new skills that can be resolved/learned as a group.
Career Coaches consult with employed people (whether while working with a company or an individual) about developing professional, social, and self-advocacy skills in order to obtain:

1) Trainings for professional skills  
2) Workplace accommodations  
3) Fulfilling other desires and needs  
4) Strategies to relate well with coworkers and supervisors  
5) Finding and applying to the right job (if you don’t have a job or are thinking of switching)
Leaving a Job: Ttyl vs Bye

• “Talk to you later”: leave a job on a good note, so you can call up your employer for a reference later!
  • Give a warning that you are planning to leave
  • (at least a two-week notice)
  • Be honest and polite when telling your boss that you’re leaving
  • Avoid speaking negatively about your employer or position when leaving

• “Goodbye”: ending your job on a negative note - certain behaviors can get you fired from a position or leave a bad impression
  • being late, rude, breaking company rules, lying, using drugs or alcohol on the job, not showing up, inflexible, stealing, using improper language, poor hygiene or dress, sharing too mouth, talking negatively about the company
RESOURCES:
WHERE ELSE CAN I GO?
Transitions RTC

Our Goals
Support youth and young adults as students, learners and workers

Youth and young adults with serious mental health conditions face obstacles in learning and working

Our Mission
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.

Introducing Comeback TV!

Comeback TV is a YouTube show aimed at the “comeback” of young adults ages 14-30 with mental health conditions. The show is a place for young adults to find the resources they need for mental health recovery, especially regarding work and school.

See episodes on Tips on Looking for a Job, Mental Health-Friendly Schools, Animal Therapy, Job Applications, Interview Attire, Peer Mentoring, and more!

Check out Comeback TV on the Transitions RTC Channel

Voices4Hope is a place for young adults with mental health conditions to find resources and engage in inspiring information that can help lead happy and independent lives.

This website was created and is maintained by young adults with mental health conditions at the Transitions Research and Training Center (RTC)

Find out more about the Voices4Hope resources!
Focal Point Magazine
Thank You!

Please....

- Grab Resource Packets and Handouts
- Sign-up for our bi-weekly email blast!
- Fill out an evaluation
- Ask us questions!

Don’t forget to visit us and get electronic resources at
- www.umassmed.edu/transitionsrtc
- www.voices4hope.net

Contact us at tania.duperoy@umassmed.edu or laura.golden@umassmed.edu or call 508-856-2168