

# PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)

## Making It Work For Young Adults With Serious Mental Health Conditions

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The Learning and Working During the Transition to  
Adulthood Research and Training Center

# Acknowledgements

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 Center.

Visit us at: <http://labs.umassmed.edu/transitionsRTC/index.htm>

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# Alphabet Soup: The PAR Breakdown

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Disrupt  
Convention

EQUAL  
Partnership

PAR

Making  
Change

Engagement



# PAR in the Mental Health Community

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# PAR in the Mental Health Community

## *Adult Movement*

- Strong PAR history with adults with SMHC
- Adults participating in “service-user” research
- Published case studies showcase benefits of PAR with adults with SMI



## *Innovations with Young Adults*

- Little work reported that infuses meaningful youth voice in mental health research and service design however...



**Young adults are more engaged and committed to services & supports that they have an active voice in**

# PAR with Young Adults: The Transitions RTC Learning Curve

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# What is the Transitions RRTC?

## National Center that aims to:

- Improve supports for the successful completion of schooling and movement into rewarding work lives among young people, ages 14-30, with serious mental health conditions (SMHC)

## How?

1. Conduct cutting-edge rigorous research that tests or informs interventions
2. Develop and translate knowledge to multiple stakeholders

3. **Infuse Participatory Action Research (PAR) into all activities**





# PAR at the Transitions RRTC

Active involvement of young adult staff with serious mental health conditions (SMHC) in **all phases of research and knowledge translation** from defining the problem to disseminating results



**YOUTH  
DECIDE**



# 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

# Research Experience

## *Appealing Features of Vocational Supports for Latino and non-Latino TAYYA Consumers (or the Young Adult Employment Study – YAES)*

- Created interview scripts
- Conducting interviews
- Transcribing interviews
- Entering data for analysis
- Interpreting themes and findings



# The Young Adult College Study

## *The Academic Experiences and Perspectives of Young Adult College Students with Mental Health Conditions*

- Secondary Analysis of Data from the “National Survey of College Students With Mental Illnesses”
  - survey by Mark Salzer, PhD.



- Created the research questions
- Analyzed data using SPSS Statistical software
- Interpreted Findings
- Developed publications

# YAB



Diversity

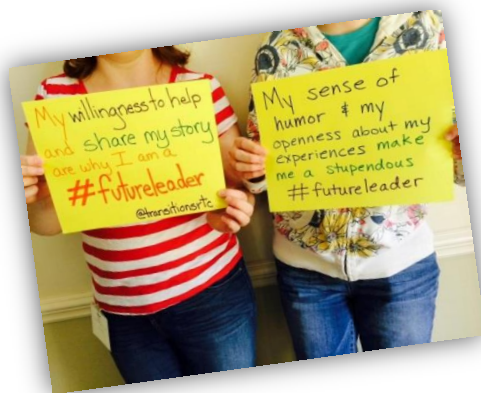
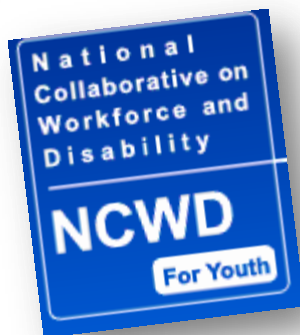
- Child Welfare
- MH Services
- Foster Care
- Juvenile Justice
- Racial Minority
- College Student
- Homelessness

National Voice

- Youth MOVE
- Home for Little Wanderers
- NAMI National
- Youth Voice Colorado



# ACTION: Speaking Engagements & Councils

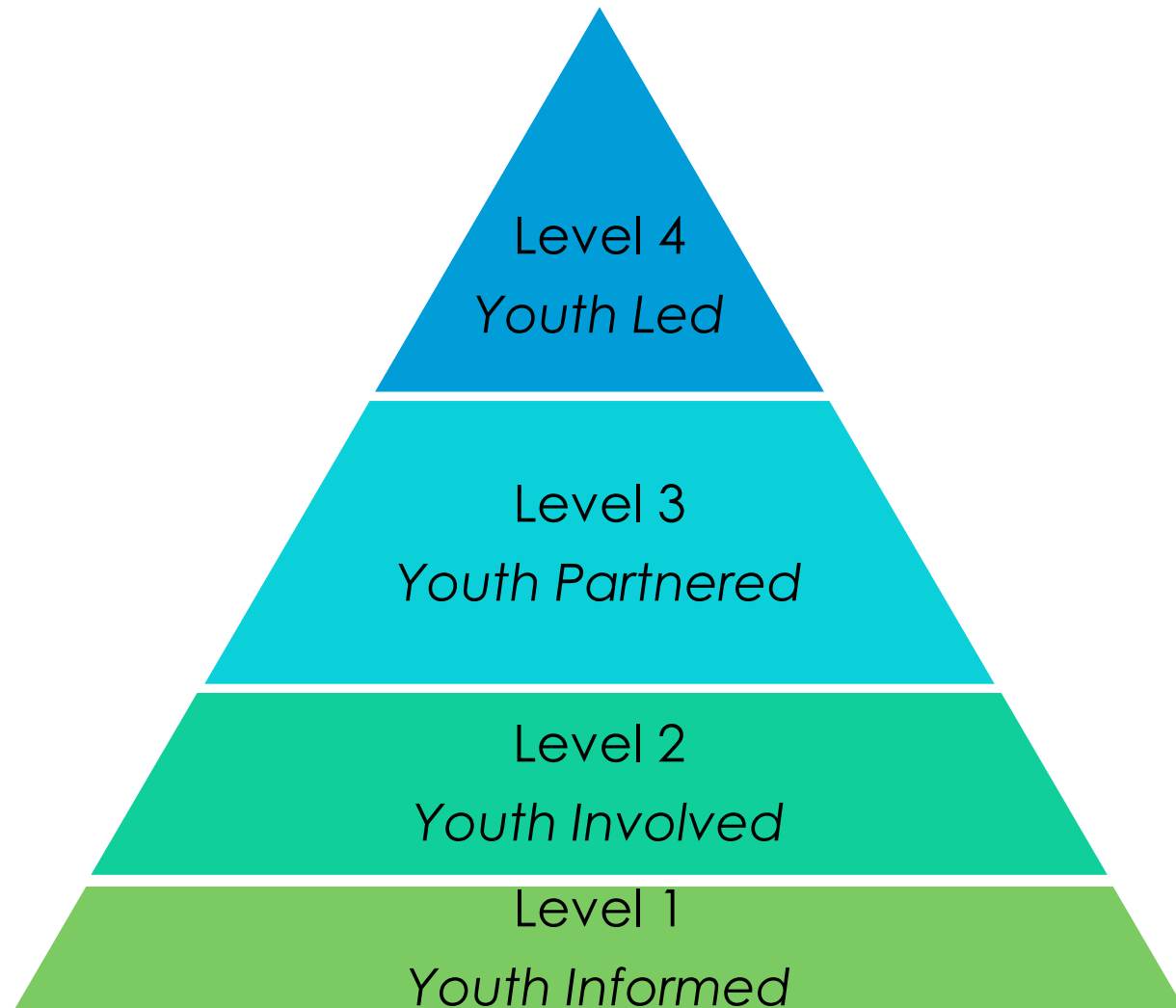


# THE PAR FRAMEWORK

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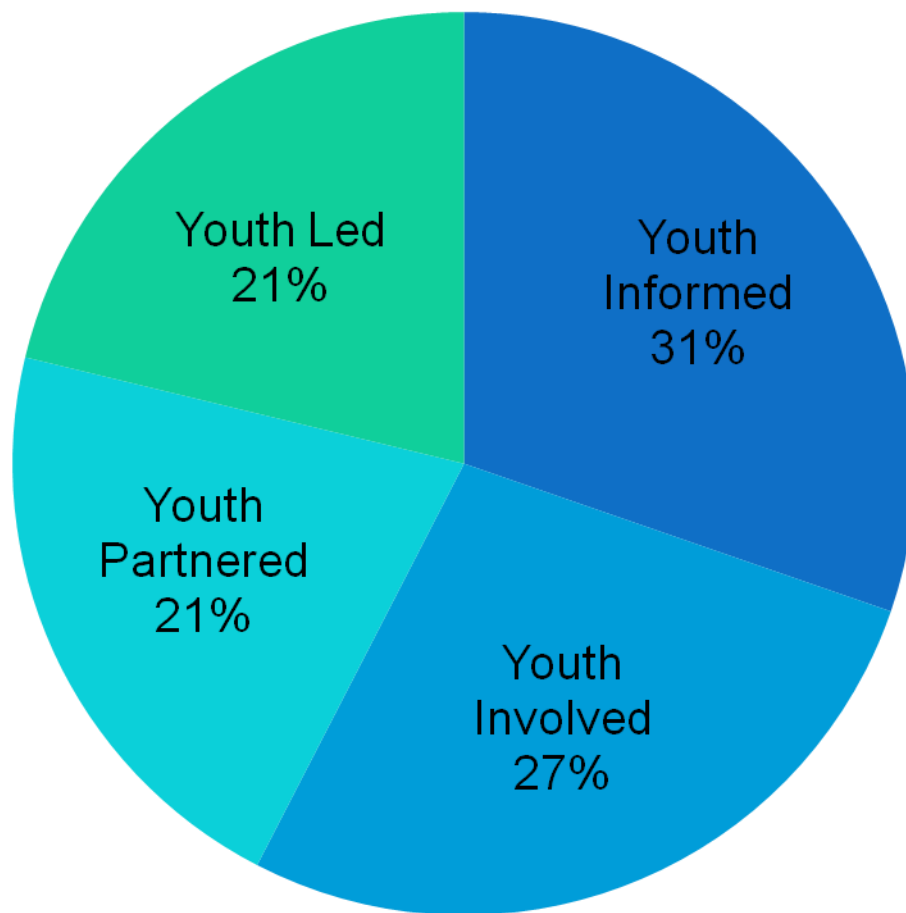


# PAR Levels of Involvement





# Levels of Involvement in Projects



# Activity Time!!

1. What challenges do providers/researchers face in including young adults in research or service design?
2. What challenges do young adults face in working with service providers/researchers?
3. What are the benefits of having young adults involved in research and service design?

Let's talk about PAR...



# Lessons Learned

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# DISCUSSION

## The Employer Perspective



# Employer Challenges

## Commitment From Team

- Fear of minimizing rigor
- Lack of clarity of roles

## Youth Culture

- Media Driven
- Viewed as “inferior”

## Lack of Professional Experience

- Imbalance in knowledge
- Lack of advocacy skills

# Solutions

Commitment  
From Team

- Top down commitment from leadership
- Clear understanding of role

Youth Culture

- Thinking outside the box
- Empowerment
- Strength-based

Lack  
Professional  
Experience

- Mentoring and modeling
- Clear Guidelines

# THE YOUNG ADULT PERSPECTIVE

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# DISCUSSION

## The Young Adult Perspective





# Challenges Unique to Young Adults Employees

Commitment  
From Team

- Lack of Inclusion
- Unclear Expectations/Interests

Youth Culture

- New to managing mental health in a professional environment
- Self-stigma & Peer comparisons
- Lack of employment experience

Lack of  
Professional  
Skills

- Still growing self-efficacy
- Learning Self-Advocacy
  - Accommodation and Communication

# Solutions

Ensuring  
Involvement

- PAR Review Committee
- Self-advocacy/Clear communication

Self-  
Awareness

- Read up on mental health and employment resources
- Peer Support
- Voicing Ideas and Preferences

Professional  
Development

- Career Coach/Mentor
- Request supports
- Taking initiative

# Ty's Perspective



“Being a part of the YAB, I could see my comments put to good use. My thoughts and opinions felt important and I was treated with respect.”



# Successes & Benefits

## Research Team

- More authentic/rich interviews
- Engaging youth participants
- Stronger connection to media/technology
- Strengthened relationship with local mental health community

## PAR Staff

- PAR staff transitioning into professional roles
- Increased self-efficacy/self-advocacy skills
- Strengthened youth voice



# Thank You!

## **Want More Information?**

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