

SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES OF ENGAGING A NATIONAL YOUTH VOICE IN SHAPING FUTURE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

Raphael Mizrahi, B.S., Amanda Costa, B.S.

Transitions Research and Training Center (RTC)

Systems and Psychosocial Advances Research Center (SPARC)

University of Massachusetts Medical School – Worcester, MA



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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What is the Transitions RTC?

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 do we do that?

1. Conduct research that supports the employment and education goals of YA
2. Develop and translate knowledge to the public
3. Infuse Participatory Action Research (PAR) into all RTC activities



Objectives for this Workshop

1. Describe how youth councils voice can help:
 - a) Promote a national diverse youth voice
 - b) improve and educate the mental health community and beyond
2. Describe benefits and challenges of facilitating a national youth council to infuse meaningful youth input into service delivery and development
3. Identify concrete tools for authentically infusing national youth voice in diverse organizations



Youth Advisory Councils: History in the Making

- Developed to provide YAs with a *meaningful* opportunity to have a voice in decisions made about resources, policies and services for this age group.
- Councils run by and for YA themselves, with “silent” support of staff/organizations
- YA develop recommendations and present written and oral history to policy makers, providers, professional organizations



How Would a Youth Council Benefit Your Organization?

- ❖ Have a UNIQUE expertise on:
 - ❖ Themselves as individuals (personal experience)
 - ❖ What works and what does not for their age group
- ❖ Generates discussions, action plans and solutions that are most relevant to YA daily lives, needs and preferences
- ❖ Staff education:
 - ❖ Sensitivity toward life as a young adult
 - ❖ Made aware of community resources/supports



****Research shows YA are more actively engaged in services/supports they have had an active voice in!****

What's in it For Young Adult Council Members?

❖ Education:

- ❖ Decision-making skills
- ❖ Vocational and skills development (resume builder!)
- ❖ Self advocacy /Self efficacy instilling empowerment

❖ Reduction of stigmatization.

❖ Relationship Building (professionally and socially)

❖ Increased self-confidence

❖ Greater likelihood of life long civic participation



YAB Member Experiences

“I’ve contributed valuable feedback that will enhance services for young adults”

“I listed the YAB on my resume as work experience. I highlight the teamwork and active listening skills required, as well as the ability to work remotely and independently.”



*“Diverse experiences,
Learning from others around
country to change my perspective”*

YAB Member Experiences

“I can give advice to those who need it, those who have lived experience might need those services and you can find out about resources from other members”

“Being able to learn from other people, you can take that knowledge and grow from that and garner life experience”

“Because we are all from different areas, we can all see the different perspectives of people from around the country”



BUILDING A YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

The Transitions RTC Experience



The Youth Advisory Board

- The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) was formed by the Transitions RTC from a desire to include youth voice directly into our work.
- As experts on Transition-Age Youth research, we recognized the importance of partnering with youth in our research efforts.
- The YAB is often used to provide youth-minded feedback on the structure, content, and language of research projects and RTC publications.



YAB History

- The YAB was created to provide input on the new Transitions RTC grant application in September 2014.
- First pre-grant YAB call- took place in April of 2014.
- Initially- calls 2x/month.
- Since it's inception:
 - Reviewed over 8 tip sheets
 - Reviewed over 10 research projects
 - Reviewed projects from over 12 colleagues



YAB Structure

- The YAB currently meets virtually on a monthly basis using zoom software.
- Calls are 2 hours long
 - Two 40-minute sessions
 - Used to get youth-minded feedback on language, content, and structure of research projects and products.
- A 10 minute break is given between the 2 sessions and time to check-in and wrap up is given before and after the call.



YAB Members

- The YAB currently has 10 members enrolled who participate in the monthly calls.
- Represented varying lived experiences:
 - Foster Care System
 - LGBTQ+
 - Criminal Justice System
 - Demographic diversity
- The only requirement for membership is that each member must be a youth/young adult with a serious mental health condition.



YAB Members



Facilitating the YAB Calls

- 2 RTC staff are each assigned 5% of their time (2 hours a week) to co-facilitate and oversee YAB activities.
- Members receive 2-3 reminder emails in the week before the call (including the day before).
- The responsibilities of the co-facilitators include finding and coordinating speakers for the calls, creating powerpoint slides during the calls, facilitating member participation during the calls, and processing invoices during the week after the call.



Engagement Strategies

Icebreaker: If you could invite any 3 people from history (past or present) to a dinner party, who would they be? Why?!



Member Expectations

- Commitment = 6 month membership
 - We check in with them twice a year to see if they are interested in renewing their membership.
- Compensation: \$30/hour for their time
- Role Expectation:
 - Join at least 4/6 calls per 6 month membership
 - Actively engage, speak up, send emails
 - Support peers, support self



Balancing the Diversity of the Group

Challenges can arise when balancing different personalities and education levels of the group.

Strategies:

- Training members on using their voice
- Checking in with each of the members individually periodically during and in between the calls.
- Developing a comfort clause



The YAB Comfort Clause

- Developed BY the YAB Members themselves!
- YAB members created a comfort clause to ensure a safe space to be themselves:
 - ✓ Using **person-first language**
 - ✓ **Stay engaged!**
 - ✓ Vegas Rule! ---Confidentiality
 - ✓ **Open honesty!** --- No judgement!
 - ✓ The “Oops” Clause
 - ✓ Comfort Clause **can be changed!**



Possible Struggles of Involving YA in Councils

❖ Trust issues between:

- ❖ Lived Experience vs. Non-Lived Experience

- ❖ Young Adult vs. Adult

- ❖ Staff lack of understanding of YA population needs

❖ Access:

- ❖ Accommodations/Transportation

- ❖ YA lack of experience and training (advocacy)

- ❖ Language: lingo and acronyms

- ❖ Constant Transitions

- ❖ Time Commitment



GETTING CONCRETE: CREATING YOUTH LED PRODUCTS



ABLE Tip Sheet Process

- The ABLE Act- what is it?!
- Our newly published tip sheet on the benefits of the ABLE Act for youth with serious mental health conditions was the first tip sheet created by our youth advisory board.
- We met with the YAB 4 times to review the language, content and structure of the tip sheet.



Meeting with the YAB: ABLE

- **First ABLE Tip Sheet Meeting:** Deciding the topic for the first YAB tip sheet
- **Second ABLE tip sheet meeting:** members determined what they wanted other youth to know about the ABLE act.
- **Third ABLE tip sheet meeting:** Detailed look at the language of the initial draft of the tip sheet to ensure it was young adult friendly.
- **Fourth ABLE tip sheet meeting:** the members commented about the structure and layout of the graphics/tables of the tip sheet as well as another review of the language.



ABLE Tip Sheet Process

- The co-facilitators applied the edits given by the YAB to the tip sheet and is currently being published by the Transitions RTC

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YAB Experiences with ABLE

“I enjoyed working remotely, working independently, and collaboratively with other people across the country on the ABLE tip sheet”

“We got to put our input and preferences while we made the tip sheet and we got to make a difference”

“I learned a lot of things I wouldn't have learned anywhere else while working on the ABLE tip sheet. I never knew about ABLE and saving money, which is a problem I have in my own life.”



Main Take-A-Ways

Youth advisory boards are able to:

- Promote a national diverse youth voice
- Improve and educate the mental health community and beyond
- Generates discussions, action plans and solutions that are most relevant to YA daily lives, needs and preferences

Members have a unique expertise on:

- Themselves as individuals (personal experience)
- What works and what does not for their age group

Staff/Member benefits:

- Better able to empathize with life as a young adult
- Awareness of community resources/supports
- Members gain professional experience



Want more information?

Email us!

Rafe: Raphael.Mizrahi@umassmed.edu

Amanda: Amanda.costa@umassmed.edu

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