



PRACTICING RECOVERY: Recovery in Transition-age Youth

Empowerment and Independence for Youth in Transition

Young people between the ages of 16 and 25 have their own [unique set of needs](#) and culture. Consequently, behavioral health providers must customize their approaches and services in ways that respect young people’s goals and hopes for the future and support them as they transition into adulthood. For any young adult, the road from childhood to adulthood is one of increased independence, responsibility, and decision-making about education, careers, and lifestyle. For young adults with mental health conditions who may also be shifting from school-based to adult-focused services and supports, this is an especially pivotal transition for continuity of care. With the support of their families, communities, and providers, young people can move toward education, employment, and social opportunities that are empowering and fulfilling.

This issue of *Practicing Recovery* explores ways the behavioral health workforce can support transition-age youth (TAY) as they plan for their futures and live meaningful and self-directed lives.

The following are more sources for information on TAY programs and other initiatives.

SAMHSA Voice Awards

The [SAMHSA Voice Awards](#) honor leaders who play a vital role in raising the public awareness and understanding of behavioral health issues to promote recovery. The 2016 Young Adult Leadership Voice Award went to 20-year-old Joshua Calarino, a youth leader in Miami, Florida, and a member of Youth M.O.V.E. National’s board of directors. Click [here](#) to hear his powerful acceptance speech.

Youth M.O.V.E. National

[Youth M.O.V.E.](#) (Motivating Others through Voices of Experience) is a youth-led national peer advocacy organization committed to promoting the growth and development of youth who are involved in mental health, juvenile justice, education, and child welfare systems. Youth M.O.V.E. has more than 50 chapters across the U.S. where they work to provide leadership and consultation on issues surrounding youth, provide training tools and guides, and advocate for the voices of youth in all programs.

National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health

The [National Federation](#) is a family-run organization that promotes and develops policies, programs, legislation, and funding that support the families of children with mental health conditions. The National Federation holds a yearly conference and has [myriad TAY resources](#), including fact sheets and webinars for providers and families.

Federal Partners in Transition (FPT)

The [Federal Partners in Transition](#) is a workgroup that includes representatives from the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor, as well as from the Social Security Administration. The workgroup developed a cross-systems approach to providing supports and services to youth with disabilities as they transition to adulthood, known as the [2020 Federal Youth Transition Plan: A Federal Interagency Strategy](#).

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

The Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures

A critical element in developing any program or research project is the perspective of the populations it will affect. For young people on the path to adulthood and self-sufficiency, this is even more important because they are still learning to become independent and shaping ideas about who they are, what they believe in, and what they want from life.

The [Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures \(Pathways RTC\)](#) in Portland, Oregon, is guided by the perspectives of young adults with serious mental health conditions and their families in its approaches to designing research and training that is focused on improving their lives.

The Center was created in response to a growing awareness that the needs and wants of TAY and young adults are different than those of children and adults, as well as the fact that there was very little research looking at effective approaches for engaging young people with serious mental health conditions and little data on what types of interventions improve outcomes.

Pathways RTC conducts research projects and develops training and technical assistance around their outcomes. These approaches are disseminated to the field via direct service providers, organization and program leaders, and policymakers.

Pathways RTC incorporates young people in a variety of ways: as ad-hoc product reviewers and consultants, advisory board members, and fully integrated research staff.

The research and resulting interventions and approaches focus on four key areas:

1. self-determination and positive identity,
2. youth- and young adult-directed decision making,
3. skills needed for adult roles, and
4. positive connections, including supportive relationships with peers and adults and engagement with community organizations and institutions.

Pathways follows the philosophy of “guiding without leading”—presenting options and opportunities but leaving the actual planning and decision-making process in the hands of the young person receiving services. This is critically important to supporting a positive developmental trajectory for TAY with mental health conditions.

Young adulthood is naturally a time of self-discovery, when individuals are learning to make decisions for themselves and developing goals and hopes for their futures. Pathways helps put young people who have had personal struggles on track with a more positive development path.

Pathways RTC’s major research projects include the following:

- [Fostering Unity Towards Uplifting Resilience, Education, and Success \(Project FUTURES\)](#)
- [EASA Connections](#)
- [Technology-enhanced Coaching for Positive Development \(TEC-PD\)](#)
- [System/Policy Assessment and Change Project \(S/PAC\)](#)
- [AMP+, Developing the Young Adult Peer Support Workforce](#)
- [Mentee-nominated Mentoring \(MNM\)](#)

Pathways offers numerous resources, both for providers and the people they serve. Below is a short list of offerings. Visit the [Pathways](#) website and sign up for the [mailing list](#) to learn more.

Tools and Tips from Pathways RTC

- [Achieving Cross-system Collaboration to Support Young People in the Transition Years: A Tip Sheet for Service Providers](#)
- [Tip sheet: Helping Young Adults from Foster Care Succeed in College](#)
- [Pathways Webinars](#)
- [Focal Point: Youth, Young Adults, and Mental Health](#) annual research review

Special thanks to Janet Walker, Ph.D., Director of the Research and Training Center for Pathways to Positive Futures, for contributing information to this article.

THOUGHT LEADER

Marsha Langer Ellison, Ph.D., Deputy Director of the Transitions Research and Training Center

Employment and education can give individuals with mental health conditions who are entering adulthood a sense of purpose and a way out of financial dependence. In fact, “purpose”—often exhibited through employment or other meaningful daily activities—is one of SAMHSA’s four major dimensions that support a life in recovery.

Dr. Marsha Ellison has committed her career to studying how employment and education empower and lead to improved outcomes for individuals with serious mental illness (SMI). Early in her career, Dr. Ellison studied psychiatric rehabilitation services and recovery constructs at the [Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation](#). Since 2006, she has been a leader in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, Massachusetts, most recently as the deputy director of one of the nation’s two NIDILRR and SAMHSA-funded research and training centers on TAY with serious mental health conditions: [Transitions RTC](#).

The mission of Transitions RTC is to promote the full participation in socially valued roles for TAY and young adults with serious mental health conditions. Transitions RTC does this by working to improve knowledge, interventions, and policies to improve educational and employment outcomes for TAY. As such, Transitions works to enable young people to gain positive employment experiences, readiness, and skill building to follow a course to take on professional, competitive work. Transitions RTC uses a supported employment model; anyone who wants to work should work and should not be hindered by their level of disability.

Transitions RTC develops research *with* the people it supports, not *for* them, a model known as [participatory action research](#). Around 50 percent of the Transitions RTC staff are young people in recovery from mental health conditions who are working up a career ladder from entry-level jobs to full-time, salaried positions. Twenty-five percent of research projects are fully youth-led.

Hand-in-hand with employment is education, says Dr. Ellison. Completing high school is often not enough for gainful employment that offers benefits, flexibility, and opportunities for advancement, so she and her team work with youth to advance beyond high school to certificate programs, associates degrees, or four-year colleges.

Dr. Ellison has spent years developing research around supported education, including working with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for [young veterans with SMI](#) who want to further their education.

Young adulthood is naturally a turbulent stage in life, with changes in relationships, cognition, values, and identity. The best programs for TAY keep that in mind, says Dr. Ellison, and recognize that what may be chaotic situations for adults, such as an upheaval in living situation, relationships, or employment, are actually pretty typical for the age group. Flexibility, respect, and dignity are incredibly important in engaging TAY and helping them make decisions and take action regarding their education and work situation.

Resources and Tools

- [Comeback TV](#): a YouTube channel led by youth in recovery
- [Voices4Hope](#): a website for young people with SMI
- Issue [briefs and tip sheets](#) for young adults, their families, and their providers
- Transitions RTC grant-funded [research projects](#)



LEARN MORE: Resources to Help You Dive Deeper

- [Implementation of a Positive Development, Evidence-supported Practice for Emerging Adults with Serious Mental Health Conditions: The Transition to Independence Process \(TIP\) Model](#)
- [The TAY Triage Tool: A Tool to Identify Homeless Transition Age Youth Most in Need of Permanent Supportive Housing](#)
- [Movement Advancement Project | LGBTQ youth survey results](#)
- [2020 Federal Youth Transition Plan: A Federal Interagency Strategy](#)
- [Foster Care Transition Toolkit](#)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE YOUTH

The best way to know what young people want is to ask them! Young people want to—and should—be partners in the design and implementation of research and in their treatment planning and delivery. Young people won't participate in programs or services that they find disempowering and stigmatizing, so treat them with respect, with dignity, and as partners rather than patients. Read [AMP's Top Ten Tips for Engaging with Young People](#).

INCLUDE YOUNG ADULTS IN YOUR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Include youth with personal experience in all aspects of your programs—from planning and research design, to advisory boards, to peer and recovery support services. Research shows that [early leadership helps young people develop meaningful skills](#) for careers and adulthood. For more information, see [Best Practices for Increasing Meaningful Youth Participation in Collaborative Team Planning](#).

USE RECOVERY ORIENTED PRACTICES

The same approaches that work for children or adults do not always work for TAY. You can refer to this [literature review of best practices](#) from SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

[Pathways RTC](#), [Transitions RTC](#), the [National Federation](#), and [Youth.gov](#) offer educational materials, webinars, and fact sheets to help behavioral health providers learn more about what make TAY unique and how best to serve them. RTP's spring webinar series explores several issues related to TAY, including youth leadership, early episode psychosis, and peer support.

RTP PRESENTATIONS

RTP Webinars

Transition-age Youth: First Episode Psychosis and RAISE Model

APR 19

*Wednesday, April 19, 2017,
from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. ET*

The second webinar in RTP's spring series on TAY, this webinar presents an overview of key learning from current research on treatment models like National Institute of Mental Health's Recovery After an Initial Schizophrenia Episode (RAISE) study about the early treatment of psychosis and will offer guidelines for making concrete changes in services to better meet the needs of today's youth.

The Start of Healthy Transitions

*Wednesday, May 3, 2017,
from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. ET*

MAY 3

The third webinar in RTP's spring series on TAY, this webinar will feature speakers from Youth M.O.V.E. who will identify the groundwork that is being laid for successful outcomes through the SAMHSA grant-funded Healthy Transitions project and will explore how providers and various disciplines can become early adopters of lessons learned. This webinar will highlight examples of recovery-oriented practices for youth and family support as well as multidisciplinary, team-based approaches.

CONFERENCES & EVENTS

World Health Day is celebrated on April 7 each year to mark the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organization. The theme for World Health Day 2017 is depression. [Depression: Let's Talk](#) is a one-year campaign that began on World Mental Health Day (October 10, 2016) with the goal that more people with depression, in all countries, will seek and get help.

APR
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The WHO website has a wide array of tools and resources to get involved with the Depression: Let's Talk campaign to raise awareness and promote help-seeking.

<http://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2017/toolkit.pdf>.

May is Mental Health Month!

[Learn more.](#)

MAY

FREE CME: NEW ON-DEMAND COURSES!

Clinical Decision Support for Practitioners Serving Individuals with Co-occurring Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders

This two-part series offers information and resources for physicians, clinicians, and other practitioners serving individuals with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorders. [Learn more!](#)