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for Behavioral Health  
NNYT


### Transition to Adulthood Roles: Young Adults Perspectives on Factors Contributing to Success

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### Purpose of the "success" study

Gain a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of young adults who are considered to have achieved some indicators of success in their transitions to adulthood.




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### Rationale

Research indicates that youth with EBD have the poorest outcomes when compared to other youth

- ✓ Higher Dropout rate
- ✓ Few Graduate from High School
- ✓ Less Enroll in Post Secondary Education
- ✓ Employment Rates are Low
- ✓ Greater Risk of Homelessness
- ✓ Higher Pregnancy Rates in Young Women
- ✓ Higher Level of Arrests




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### Rationale


- Growing interest in the well-being of youth with EBD as they enter adulthood.
- Literature on transitioning youth tends to document poor adult outcomes or is deficit-based.
- Some evidence that many youth and young adults with EBD navigate the passage to adulthood quite successfully.
- Studies on successful youth and young adults are very limited.

Absence of the voice of youth in existing research.



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### Success despite EBD



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### Research question


"What factors enable young people with emotional/behavioral disturbances (EBD) to successfully transition to adult roles?"



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### Qualitative - Exploratory Study

- To give a voice to successful youth and young adults as they transition into adult roles (e.g., describe real life experiences; share what they view as effective supports & processes).
- Begin the process of developing a conceptual framework (e.g., generate hypothesis).



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### Definition of Success

- ✓ A multi-dimensional concept that encompassed factors such as:
  - ✓ Educational achievements
  - ✓ Career and employment status
  - ✓ Independent living
  - ✓ Personal and social relationships
  - ✓ Social-emotional adjustment and functioning
- ✓ Movement toward acceptable adult behavior, achievements in relation to society's norms, and developmental state
  - ✓ Graduation from regular high school
  - ✓ Entering a post-secondary educational program
  - ✓ Finding and keeping a job
  - ✓ Living on one's own



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### Recruitment of Participants

- Purposive Sampling - Development of Matrix (inclusion criteria).
- Project managers and transition facilitators from four Transition to Independence Process (TIP) developing sites in Florida invited to identify/nominate potential participants (successful youth and young adults).
- Nomination criteria:
  - ✓ History of EBD;
  - ✓ Received some transition to adulthood services;
  - ✓ Overcame significant challenges ;
  - ✓ Graduated from high school;
  - ✓ Achieved noteworthy accomplishments.


Matrix completed/reviewed for all applicants (21 youth/young adults).



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### Recruitment of Participants


- IRB approval
- Phone scripts used to invite potential participants to participate in study - Telephone calls (2)
  - ✓ 12 nominees were eliminated from the identified pool of potential participants (e.g., could not be located, refused to participate, did not meet specified criteria).
- Informed Consents
- Monetary incentive for participation (\$25.00)
- Thank you notes for recruiters



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### Description of Participants


- Nine (9) nominees were interviewed for this study. Data from seven (7) participants included in study due to insufficient interview data and criteria not met for two participants.
- Participants primarily classified as youth with EBD/SED
- Between ages 17 through 20 (average age: 19)
- 3 females (43%) and 4 males (57%).
- 5 Caucasian/Non-Hispanic (72%); 1 African-American (14%); & 1 Hispanic decent (14%).
- All participants lived in Florida
- Determined to have experienced transition success as evidenced by:
  - ✓ Completion of high school
  - ✓ Participation in PSE
  - ✓ Gainful employment
  - ✓ Adequate community adjustment



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### Participants

- **Albie:** History of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) with disruptive, aggressive, violent behavior as well as physical abuse -- succeeded in developing artistic skills and in following his career plans to work as a photographer in a commercial firm.
- **Chester:** Underwent 2 brain surgeries to alleviate seizures believed to have caused anger and social ostracism -- Several out-of-home placements - Successfully graduated from HS.
- **Charlie:** Youth with history of co-occurring Substance Abuse and Conduct Disorder including a period of incarceration & probation. Was able to resist negative influence and gain/maintain employment as well as enroll in a course of study (education) at a community college.
- **Philip:** History of persistent sadness, social isolation and suicidal attempts. Was diagnosed with Separation Anxiety and Major Depressive Disorders. Was able to conquer fears and succeed academically. Plans to enter a post-secondary program to become a psychologist.



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## Participants

- **Libby:** Diagnosed as Bipolar and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), was once a rebellious teenager, with truant behavior and trouble with the law -- became a responsible single mother living in her own apartment.
- **Lucia:** Had over forty foster home placements and minor involvement with Juvenile Justice; experienced physical and mental abuse during her youth as well as feelings of abandonment. Managed to deal with her anger issues, graduate from high school, and develop a plan to enter (and finance) a nursing program at a local community college.
- **Madeline:** Diagnosed as Bipolar and on psychotropic medication most of her life - had difficulty concentrating; slept in class. With the support of the same ESE teacher for five years, she graduated - received training and employment assistance. She obtained a position she loves at a nursing home following graduation from HS.



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## Data Collection

- ✓ The *Success Study Interview* protocol, a data collection instrument containing open-ended questions, was developed/used to interview participants.
- ✓ Interviews were conducted at the young person's home or an other location selected by the young person.
- ✓ Recorded interviews ranged in length from 1 and 1.5 hours.
- ✓ Interviews were tape recorded - later transcribed (with permission from participants).



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## Success Study Interview Protocol - Focus of Questions

- Literature and previous analyzed data drove the directions of the questions.
- Semi-structured interviews utilizing open-ended questioning.
- Interviewees were encouraged to "tell their story" describe their real-life experiences, what they consider success/model of success, their own successes and challenges, share what they view as effective transition supports and services (to overcome perceived challenges), and offer advice in the following areas:
  - ✓ Education
  - ✓ Employment
  - ✓ Living Situation
    - Family Life
    - Residential
  - ✓ Community Life
  - ✓ Social Integration & Activities
  - ✓ Emotional/Behavioral Adjustment

## Data Analysis

- Data from seven interviews were analyzed using Glaser and Strauss(1967) constant comparison method for the development of grounded theory.
- Reliability was addressed through inter-rater agreement regarding the interpretation of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).



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## Findings: Five Thematic Pathways

Qualitative analysis yielded the following five (5) thematic pathways associated with successful transitions to adulthood:

- ✓ 1: **Goal Orientation**
- ✓ 2: **Interests and Abilities**
- ✓ 3: **Creative Coping Strategies**
- ✓ 4: **Social Support**
- ✓ 5: **Role Models**



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## Theme 1: Goal Orientation

- Participants were future and goal oriented.
- They had a sense of purpose, a focus, and a direction.
- Had practical, realistic, attainable aspirations that were very similar to the goals and aspirations of their peers with no disability.
- Although most young people interviewed seem to realize it may be more difficult for them to achieve their dreams than it would be for youth who do not have EBD, they all seemed ready to do what needs to be done to accomplish what they set out to do in life.
- Were insightful and reflective.
- Were either "confident" to "extremely confident" in their ability to face the future.




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**We heard..**

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- ✓ *"By the time I'm 25, I want to have my own apartment, be on my own. By the time I'm 40, I want to own my own house".*
- ✓ *"I want to take a cosmetology course in nails, hair and makeup...I know can get educational loans because I'm a single mother".*
- ✓ *"One day I woke up and I said, Bummer! I wanna go to college.... My mom agreed to open a savings account for me to go to college...".*
- ✓ *"I plan for it; I take one step at a time; I think ahead".*

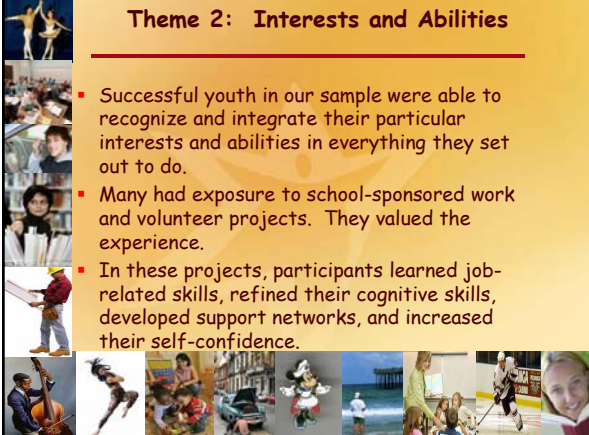


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**Theme 2: Interests and Abilities**

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- Successful youth in our sample were able to recognize and integrate their particular interests and abilities in everything they set out to do.
- Many had exposure to school-sponsored work and volunteer projects. They valued the experience.
- In these projects, participants learned job-related skills, refined their cognitive skills, developed support networks, and increased their self-confidence.




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**We heard..**

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- *"I didn't have much patience...I couldn't handle it [experience working with animals]; [now employed in a nursing home]... with them, I have all the patience in the world...they lift my spirit; I love it!".*
- *"I like to build things so I want to become like a carpenter".*
- *"At school, I liked flutes, boys and friends..If it weren't for friends, I would not have gone to school".*
- *" Our after school program kept me up when I was down. If I had a bad day in school, I used to say maybe I'd have a better day tomorrow at the Boys and Girls Club".*



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**Theme 3: Creative Coping Strategies**

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- Successful youth in our sample developed and used creative strategies, techniques, devices, and other mechanisms to enhance their ability to cope and perform well.
- Youth in our sample worked hard and persisted in achieving their goals. Most were willing to make sacrifices and extend extra efforts demanded by their particular situation in order to succeed.
- A variety of skills building techniques such as time management, problem-solving, decision-making, reframing, self-talk and application of anger management techniques are used by most of the young people we interviewed to deal with obstacles encountered on the road to success.

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**We heard..**

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- *" If you work on it every day, every day, you'll get better at it...I just put all my hard work into it".*
- *"...my grades were low and I had a lot of trouble concentrating in school. And then...by January to June, that's when I had to do my best cause I was still without medication for me to concentrate on my studies. At least I tried my hardest and that's when my grades went up. By my sophomore year, that was my best high school year because that's when my grades were up and never went down. Even if my test grades were down, the teachers would still give me one more chance to work on it and I did".*
- *"Anything they want to do illegal or I don't like, I won't do with them. Why? Because it's not the right thing to do. Drug stuff is bad for you. I know drugs personally. You get addicted to drugs. Drugs can slow you down in your life from the goals you want to reach in the future".*
- *"I now talk to them about it [feelings of aggression and anger] before it bubbles up".*

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**Theme 4: Social Support**

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- Youth recognized the need for support.
- Took advantage of available help.
- Established a network of positive and supportive people.
- Support was provided to them in many forms including:
  - ❖ Emotional support providing a caring and trusted person with whom the youth could share experiences.
  - ❖ Instrumental support providing tangible aid and services.
  - ❖ Informational support providing advice, suggestions, and information that youth can use to address difficulties.
  - ❖ Appraisal support providing information useful for self-evaluation, constructive feedback, affirmation and social comparison.
- Common elements observed in support provided included dependability, encouragement, guidance, patience and protection.


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### We heard...

- "The thing that kinda made me believe in the things in life, to take things seriously, was my godmother...She encouraged me to do a lot. She helped me study. She was always there for me to talk to".
- "My grandmother does a lot of reading and is very knowledgeable...If she didn't help me I probably wouldn't know much because my parents don't know much".
- "My music teacher would always encourage me saying you are very smart. You can do it...She saw a lot of potential in me. She didn't put up with my crap. She would call me on everything!"
- "Before, I didn't think I would be able to handle it and shop on my own. Miss P. taught me how to relax, take everything slow, and manage my money". She adds: "If it weren't for her, I don't know where I would be".
- "They [parents] did not give up on me. They helped by giving me ideas...suggestions...cause they know what really is my problem".


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### Theme 5: Role Models

- Many young people had positive role models who provided encouragement and demonstrated, through their own experiences, how to succeed in the face of challenges.
- Many participants named role models from within the immediate family, however, some named teachers and celebrity.
- Most participants had some connection with the named role model. The primary connection was a familial relationship.
- Other connections were a perceived shared challenge leading the young person to believe that if their role model could overcome challenge, then he/she young person could do the same.


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### We heard...


- "My godmother had kids when she was young; held three jobs at once to make it. She's a very strong woman, I love her for who she is. She's a nice person. She's going to college and wants to be a teacher. She's the one who boosts me to go to college. I am starting college this year!"
- "Oprah Winfrey is my role model - She worked for everything she has. I watched a biography about her. She didn't have shoes and now she's a billionaire. She did it all herself".
- "My dad...He enjoys his work and if something's is hard for him, he'll keep on doing it. He is so persistent and he is happy".
- "My grandma's almost 80 years old. She still works full time, pays all her own bills, got her house paid off, got everything. She's done it for a very long time. She's very independent. She helps us out when we run low. She's got credit better than God".

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### Successful Youth


- Have goals and aspiration.
- Choose transition goals that fit their interests and abilities.
- Are insightful and reflective.
- Work hard at achieving their goals.
- Are positive and hopeful.
- Persist in the face of failure.
- Learn creative ways to compensate and cope.
- Have role models - Models of Success.
- Have and use their support systems.



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### Limitations


- Limited generalizability due to small sample size and selection from Florida TIP sites.
- Diversity - lack of Pacific Asian representation.
- Cultural and gender differences were not studied.
- Young age of participants - Not longitudinal.
- Possibilities of errors associated with bias and subjectivity
- Youth not involved in evaluation process.



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### Implications


- This study provided illustrations of the experience of youth and young adults during their journey into adulthood.
- Provided youth and young adults an opportunity to express their voice.
- Expansion of knowledge related to factors that enable young people with EBD to successfully transition to adult roles (generated elements to develop hypothesis).
- Contribution to the small but growing qualitative literature base in the field of transition.
- Results seem to support literature on resilience.



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**Implications for practitioners, educators,  
program administrators, and policy makers**

- Programs and policies should support the development of community transition systems that incorporate the following features:
  - ✓ Incorporate the young person's future focus in transition planning and services.
  - ✓ Base transition plans on early identification of the youth's abilities and interests.
  - ✓ Teach creative coping techniques to become self-determined adults - including problem-solving, learning from the consequences of their decisions, exploring boundaries, self-advocacy skills, time and money management, ability to persevere and reframe.
  - ✓ Ensure continuous and consistent social support.
  - ✓ Encourage young people to identify and learn from role models.
- These features are components of the Transition to Independence Process (TIP) model that is now considered an evidence-supported practice.

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***Now It is Your Turn!***



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