

Experience mapping: exploring the thoughts, feelings, and actions of youth as they enrol and complete an IPS program

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Introduction

The Foundry Work and Education Program is a new evidence-based supported work and study program offered at Foundry, a provincial Integrated Youth Services organization in British Columbia (BC), Canada. The program uses an Individual Placement Support (IPS) model to help meet the wellness needs of diverse youth by coordinating their health, work and study goals. Although this model is centred on an individualized approach, youth engagement and retention can be a challenge. To best support youth and understand some of the barriers to engagement and retention, a project was developed to map out the experiences and actions of youth across the various phases and critical transition points (e.g., starting a new job). The results are being used to design core elements of the program and create engagement strategies for IPS staff during identified periods of risk for NEET youth.

Objectives & Methods

Objectives:

- 1) Understand youth's thoughts, feelings and actions in the IPS phases (discovery, enrolment, pursuit of goals, maintenance, and completion).
- 2) Identify risks to engagement during phases and transition points of the program.
- 3) Describe solutions co-designed with a youth advisory committee to mitigate youth risks in transition phases and improve the overall quality of the program.

Methods: Six separate focus groups were conducted that included a total of 15 youth and 8 family members/caregivers. Youth and family peer engagement coordinators led an exploration of the thoughts, feelings and actions of participants through a journey mapping exercise. Recordings from the focus groups were transcribed and a thematic analysis used to identify themes.

Results



Enrolment Phase

Major Themes
 Building trust, safety and walking along side youth

Youth Actions
 Seeking information and reaching out for support
 Sharing personal information and experiences

Youth Needs
 Low-barrier, free, judgement-free support
 Individualized and strength-based approach

Program Actions
 Tailoring program to individuals
 Prioritizing relationship development
 Focus on validating experiences and building motivation

I'm feeling overwhelmed, anxious and uncertain, but I'm also curious and optimistic.

"Tipping the scale, [it could] go either way"

"It should [be] easy like, as if, going to a doctor's office"

I'm feeling hopeless, anxious, and worried about further rejection. I'm overwhelmed, uncertain and doubtful that I can get the help I need.

Discovery Phase

Major Themes
 Feeling doubtful and navigating support

Youth Actions
 Seeking advice from friends, family, other supports
 Exploring the internet and social media

Youth Needs
 A program that is accessible and easy to find

Program Actions
 Promoting safety and support aspects
 Trusted service providers strategizing how to reach isolated youth

Pursuit of Goals Phase

Major Themes
 A time for building skills at a pace set by the youth
 A time to discover their own path and journey

Youth Actions
 Developing interpersonal, employment or educational skills
 Exploring options, their own interests and making decisions

Youth Needs
 Goal support, validation and individualized support
 Self-pacing, autonomy, support balancing multiple demands
 Financial literacy
 A judgment-free space with compassion and respect

Program Actions
 Frequent check-ins, celebrating milestones, focus on support and encouragement
 Trauma-informed and resiliency-based focus, with feedback invited
 Unconditional support and "failure" is viewed as learning
 A focus on choice and self-discovery

I'm impatient, defeated, frustrated, nervous from interviews, yet hopeful, supported and motivated. I'm unsure of expectations, feeling a pressure to succeed. I'm doubting my abilities and if work will be safe for me. Financial worries are still on my mind.

I'm happy, empowered and relieved but worried about doing this on my own.

Program Completion

Major Themes
 Building momentum with the youth

Youth Actions
 Continuing to develop work and education skills
 Deciding if they still need support

Youth Needs
 Continue to work through this phase at their own pace
 Feel supported and empowered to go forward on their own

Program Actions
 Tapering support based on the youth's needs
 Helping youth with additional resources beyond the program

"I can do anything I want to do in the world"

Maintenance Phase

Major Themes
 Building momentum with the youth
 Youth are fearful of losing support

Youth Actions
 Adjusting to new demands of employment or education
 Assessing if this opportunity is the right fit or if a change is needed

Youth Needs
 Continued access to supports that are not time or outcome driven
 Focus on the youth's needs and individual plan

Program Actions
 Ensure clear expectations around time unlimited approach of IPS
 Support youth to develop toolkit to manage health and employment/education
 Focus on building momentum based on strengths and success so far

I'm worried about being abandoned and scared to be alone, but I'm also starting to feel empowered, excited, optimistic, accomplished and relief.

Practice Implications and Conclusion

There is a social pressure to succeed coupled with doubts about abilities and worthiness amongst youth.

We need to meet them where they are at, see them for who they are and help them know they are worth it.

Sustained meaningful engagement in education and work is a major indicator of recovery. IPS programs like the Foundry Work and Education Program can be critical in supporting youth living with mental health and substance use concerns in achieving their work and study goals through IYS. By understanding the thoughts, feelings and actions of youth considering or engaged in IPS, programs can better support them and mitigate risks to engagement and completion, leading to higher success rates and recovery outcomes.

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