



RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

The final report of the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health describes the need for fundamental transformation of mental health care in America. According to the report, successful transformation would result in mental health care that focuses on *facilitating recovery* and *building resilience*. Efforts to transform children's mental health care have been underway for over twenty years; however these efforts have been largely based on the *system of care principles*, which make no direct mention of either recovery or resilience. Understandably, this has led to some confusion about the relationship between a resilience-and-recovery framework on the one hand, and systems of care principles on the other. Are they compatible, or do they represent two distinct visions of transformation?

This issue of *Focal Point* explores the concepts of resilience and recovery and what they mean in the context of mental health care for children and adolescents. From the articles, it emerges that the *terminology* associated with recovery and re-

silience (particularly the word *recovery* itself) can be confusing and even off-putting to stakeholders in children's mental health. On the other hand, the larger underlying *concepts* of recovery and resilience are appealing to stakeholders, and are also highly compatible with system of care values. This point is explored explicitly in the articles by Barbara Friesen and Charles Huffine, but the same implication appears throughout other contributions as well.

Beyond merely being compatible with system of care values, a resilience-and-recovery perspective highlights new ideas and strategies for transforming mental health care for children and adolescents. For example, Friesen found that young people and their families were most excited by the focus on hope and optimism that figures prominently in both recovery and resilience. Terre Garner similarly reports that young people and families see hope as the cornerstone of effective mental health care. Hal Shorey and C. R. Snyder argue that hope is a crucial element in successful maturation and development, particularly dur-

ing the transition from childhood to adulthood. What is more, Shorey and Snyder describe a system they have developed for teaching hopeful thinking to adolescents.

Similarly, a resilience-and-recovery framework draws attention to the importance of connectedness as a developmental asset for all youth, including youth who are at-risk, troubled, or struggling with emotional or behavioral difficulties. For younger children, connections to caregivers are central, while for older children and adolescents, other connections become increasingly important: connections to peers and individuals, organizations, and institutions in the wider community. Through these kinds of connections, young people gain emotional support and access opportunities to discover and develop skills, talents, and vision. Young people thrive when their communities are rich in the kinds of opportunities that draw out their assets. This interplay of individual and community assets is explored in detail by Christina Theokis, Richard Lerner, and Erin Phelps, using Search Institute data

from a large and diverse sample of teens.

Hope and connectedness are intertwined in a resilience-and-recovery perspective. Using longitudinal data from her Kauai study, Emmy Werner argues that positive development is promoted when young people acquire the conviction that they can overcome problems by their own actions. This type of hopeful outlook is more likely to develop when young people have emotional support available, and when they have access to opportunities to learn and to acquire skills. In Werner's study, this was true not only for at-risk children who proved resilient, but also for troubled teenagers who recovered as young adults.

On a more personal level, this is the same message delivered by Melanie Green and Angela Nelson. Both young women have developed a hopeful, empowered stance that has enabled them to move ahead in their lives despite considerable adversity. Formal services may help, as they did for Green, or they may contribute to difficulties, as they did for Nelson. Ultimately, however, what these young women seek is a place in the community and the opportunity to develop their skills and talents.

When young people have hope, connectedness, and opportunities, they are more likely to be able to "bounce back" from adversity. A resilience-and-recovery framework

helps us expand our thinking about how to provide interpersonal and community environments that help struggling young people acquire these crucial assets and return to a positive developmental path.

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RTC Projects 2004 - 2009

Beginning in October 2004, the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health was funded for five years to undertake six major research projects described below. For more information, visit www.rtc.pdx.edu.

Voices of Youth and Families: Community Integration of Transition-Age Youth is designed to gain understanding of community integration from the perspectives of transition-age youth, young adults, and caregivers, and examine links between the concepts of community integration, youth and family participation in individualized planning, empowerment, the effects of stigma, and recovery and resilience.

Transforming Futures: Research on Expanding the Career Aspirations of Youth with Mental and Emotional Disorders addresses the under-researched area of transition supports and services for youth who are preparing for adulthood, with a specific focus on employment. This project features a web-based intervention connecting youth with adult mentors who have struggled with mental illness and have successful employment outcomes.

Partnerships in Individualized Planning will develop instruments to assess youth empowerment, youth participation in planning, and perceptions of the utility and feasibility of youth participation in planning. The project will also develop and evaluate an intervention to increase the participation of youth and family members in the individualized planning and service process.

Work-Life Integration directly addresses the issue of community integration for the adult caregivers of children and youth with emotional disorders, specifically with regard to their ability to maintain employment. This

project is designed to influence the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of human resource professionals, with a view to reducing stigma and increasing the family friendliness of their organizations.

Transforming Transitions to Kindergarten focuses on the families' experiences of the shift from pre-school to kindergarten when children have emotional/behavioral challenges. The project will develop and test a training intervention to increase the capacity of early childhood and kindergarten settings to meet the needs of these children, and a family-driven team-based transition intervention to promote the success of children and their families as they move from pre-school to kindergarten. The project will also include a review of evidence-based practice in the field of mental health consultation.

Practice-Based Evidence: Building Effectiveness from the Ground Up will conduct a case study in partnership with a Native American youth organization and the National Indian Child Welfare Association. The project addresses the need to conduct effectiveness studies of practices that are believed to be helpful, but for which little evidence exists.

Additionally, the Center will continue to undertake a range of dissemination, training, and technical assistance activities. These include our *Building on Family Strengths Conference*, **FOCAL POINT**, our award-winning website, and our two listservs, *Data Trends* and *rtcUpdates*.