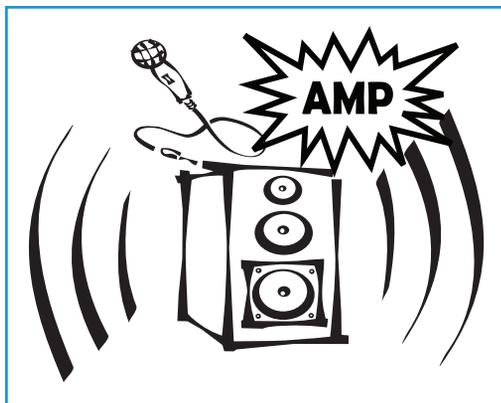


Developing a New Intervention: Reflections of a Youth Advisor

Nathan, age 20, along with his mom, Sonja, have been dedicated members of the Achieve My Plan! (AMP) advisory board for the past three years. Nathan has dealt with mental health issues all of his life, and has been involved with various treatment, education and counseling services for nearly as long. During his treatment and education planning meetings, Nathan remembers “never feeling like my opinion mattered or was important to anyone.... People just spoke for me. I never realized it should have been the other way around.”

Nathan recalls that several years ago his mom received an email inviting her and Nathan to become advisors for a project that was working to increase youth participation and engagement in their treatment, education and transition planning. (The project was later named AMP.) Although his mom was unsure, Nathan talked her into going, mainly because it paid more than he could make working. Nathan describes the AMP advisory board meetings he



has attended as an opportunity to be heard by a group of researchers, caregivers, professionals and other youth. “People in the meeting actually cared about what I thought and what I had to say. Now I know that my opinion matters,” Nathan remarks, regarding his experience in helping to shape the AMP intervention and related materials. Over the years as an advisor, Nathan has not only shaped AMP materials, but has also presented with members of the research team at a number of conferences. However, Nathan’s favorite activity has been acting in role plays that were taped for various AMP trainings and social

marketing videos.

Nathan believes strongly that the work he is doing on AMP is important. He thinks that AMP can “give youth a sense of self confidence, and help them to feel more independent.” Being an advisor to the AMP project has also affected Nathan in a positive way. Nathan admits that while his motivation to become an AMP advisor in the beginning was “mostly about the money,” he says that it has become about much more than that. “Before all of this [AMP],” Nathan reports, “I didn’t know what I wanted to do.... I wanted to be an archaeologist, but there isn’t much demand for that.” Now, Nathan sees himself walking a new path. “I want to become a spokesperson for people with mental health issues, and help them get the most out of life. Before being on the board, I never talked. Now, I want to make a career out of it!”

*-by Elizabeth Thorne, AMP Project
Manager, based on an interview with
Nathan Tanner*