

PATHWAYS COMICS

Study Guide for Vol. 5, “Moving On”

What’s the point?

When it comes to engaging youth and young adults in mental health services and supports, there is no magic wand or “one-size-fits-all” approach. While some youth and providers might “click” from their first meeting, for many, engagement and rapport-building is something that takes time, requires patience and persistence on the part of the provider, and certainly cannot be forced or faked. Youth who have had past negative experiences with systems or providers will be especially guarded against manipulation or judgment and are apt to disengage within the first few meetings with a new practitioner if they feel things aren’t working. Such was the case for James, the protagonist of our Pathways comic series, after an upsetting first encounter with his school counselor. Were it not for his friend Zoe inviting him to the Pacific Drop-in Center, it is uncertain when or how James would next have been willing or able to access support for his mental health or his struggles in school.

When we last saw James in volume 4 of our comic series, he had begun to warm up to the “drop” after some initial reluctance, and was starting to connect with the youth peer support specialist employed there, Taylor. We saw how Taylor was able to begin engaging James in conversation



about his recent struggles by inviting him to participate in fun, low-pressure activities such as pool and video games. In this volume, Taylor takes the initiative to reach out to James and follow up on their last meeting, texting him to ask when he will be back at the “drop” and wishing him a nice day. This is a simple way to let a young person know that they are valued, and doing so in the form of a text is a great way to connect with youth on their own terms – those who work with youth know that most would be far less likely to answer a phone call. Later, when James feels thrown into crisis, he is comfortable texting Taylor for support because Taylor has, over time, shown himself to be a person worth trusting.

When Taylor and James are able to connect later at the drop-in center, Taylor keeps their conversation light and supportive, engaging James over a

board game and sharing a bit of their own story related to struggling in high school. This is a good example of how youth peer support specialists can strategically share their lived experience to normalize what a youth is going through as well as to relate to them, build trust and inspire hope; and we see how this opens James up to the idea of planning for his own future.

In the final issue of the Pathways comics, we see James celebrating the achievement of earning his GED surrounded by those who have been there for him on his journey: Mike, his neighbor who made himself available for support but never pushed an agenda; Zoe, James' friend who checked on him when she noticed he had been missing school and connected him with a new resource; Taylor, his youth peer who became a trusted ally

and supported him to overcome his obstacles and make a plan; and of course Jarvis, his canine companion through it all. While at the beginning of his story we saw James struggle to identify even one support in his life, here he is readily able to recognize and thank those who helped him along the way.

These comics were developed by people with lived experience in the youth mental health system. As you reflect on these comics and work through this study guide, alone or with your team, it is our hope that you consider the ways in which James' story does or does not reflect the stories of other system-involved young people, and how you might continue to become more youth-driven in your own work.

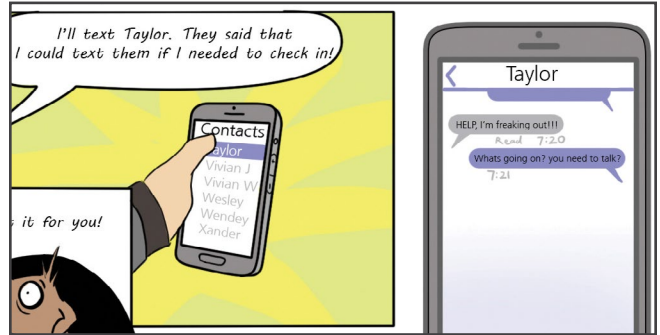
Things to keep in mind

- * Youth engagement should be individualized: for example, certain youth might like to be contacted by phone call, while others may prefer text or even social media outreach.
- * Persistence in engagement is not about badgering or bothering the young person, but letting them know you are available, giving them space to show up on their own terms, and trying different forms of engagement when something's not working.
- * When sharing a bit of your own story with a youth, think about what the purpose of doing so is, and try to avoid centering yourself. It's also important to think about how certain self-disclosures might trigger the young person before sharing.
- * Taking time to celebrate accomplishments is an important part of doing strengths-based work and renewing engagement with young people. Make sure to check in on progress and celebrate the small successes along the way!

Discussion questions

1

In issue 2 of this volume, James receives an “urgent notice” from his school district and reaches out to Taylor for help. How would you respond if a young person you were working with came to you with this issue? What do you think of Taylor’s approach?



Scene from Vol 5, “Moving On,” Issue 2

2

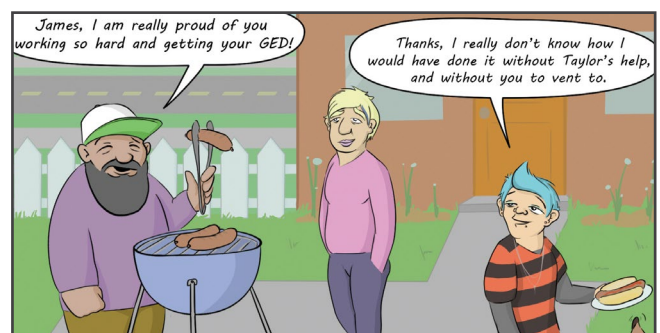
Taylor shares with James that they did not graduate high school but were later able to get their GED and associate’s degree. How do you think this bit of “strategic sharing” helped connect with James? Would you have done or said anything differently?



Scene from Vol 5, “Moving On,” Issue 3

3

In the final issue, we see James has built the self-determination skill of “identifying support” when he recognizes how Mike and Taylor helped him get his GED. What other skills might James have built over the course of this comic series?



Scene from Vol 5, “Moving On,” Issue 4

Reflections

- * Have you ever worked with a young person who was “difficult to engage”? What obstacles did you face? What sorts of strategies did you use?
- * What sorts of “non-traditional” engagement techniques have you tried with young people?
- * Have you ever shared bits of your lived experience with a young person? What was the purpose, and how did it go?
- * What are some ways you’ve celebrated a young person’s strengths, successes or accomplishments?

Resources



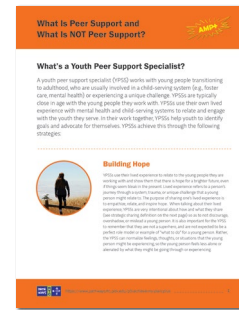
EMERGING STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN SYSTEMS OF CARE

<https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/emerging-strategies-for-engaging-young-people.pdf>



IMPLEMENTING THE PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST ROLE: PEER SUPPORT IN A YOUTH-LED DROP-IN CENTER

<https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/proj4-YMO-peer-support-case-study.pdf>



WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT AND WHAT IS NOT PEER SUPPORT?

<https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/proj-5-AMP-what-is-peer-support.pdf>

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Read comics at:

www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/comics



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