Agenda and Opening Plenary

The goal of the State-of-the-Science Conference, held on May 20 and 21, 2013 in Portland, Oregon, was to bring together expert stakeholders to address key topics and questions related to the Pathways model and its implications for practice and policy. The conference was limited to 50 attendees so that participants could work actively in a series of tightly facilitated small and large group sessions. Participants included researchers; practitioners and administrators from well-regarded programs; young people; families; and policy makers. More than a quarter of the attendees were young people with direct personal experience receiving services for a serious mental health condition. A list of attendees is provided in Appendix A, and the conference agenda is provided in Appendix B. Details about the topics, questions and procedures for each conference session is provided in the corresponding section of these proceedings.

The conference began with a plenary session that focused on providers' role in helping young people "activate change" in their lives. The premise explored in the plenary was that providers activate change by using specific "bits and pieces" of practice (small procedures, specific steps or skills, a series of questions, etc.) to infuse the practice mode into the activities of an intervention. (This is represented in the diagram on page 13 by the flowing together of the arrows from the "what" and the "how" boxes on the left.) In other words, these bits or pieces of practice are fully consistent with the practice mode (e.g., by helping a young person recognize or use strengths, or by assisting the young person in exploring his or her own perspective) while also helping the young person accomplish tasks related to the intervention and/or learn or practice skills for doing so.

An example of a practice "piece" provided in the plenary was a skill called "making decisions." This was a short procedure that coaches reported having taught to intervention participants. The procedure is intended to help young people stop to think about decisions rather than simply reacting, and to consider what will be best for them not just in the present, but also in the future. The procedure is consistent with the practice mode because it is a way of helping young people clarify their own perspectives. It is also a skill that is useful in helping young people learn about how make decisions that will help them move toward personally meaningful goals.

The "making decisions" procedure has three steps. First, brainstorm at least three options for what to do. This prevents the decision from becoming only a black and white choice between two options. Three or four options are preferred because considering a larger number could take too much time. It is important to include any "taboo" options as well. So, for example, if the choice is regarding what to do when you don't have stable housing and a scary guy says you can stay at his house, one of the options is to stay at his house. After the options have been identified, the coach helps the young person think about pros and cons for each one. The pros and cons should consider both what will happen in the short run as well as in the future. Based on this information, the young person makes a decision.

An example of an even smaller practice "bit" was also identified in the plenary. This was culled from an interview with a provider who stressed the importance of discovery in his work as a coach with young adults. Throughout his interview he mentioned numerous ways that he encouraged young people to find out about things, to try something new and to take risks. He described how he was always alert for when a young person might mention something they were interested in or curious about, and his response would be, "Let's find out more," whether by searching the internet, finding someone knowledgeable to talk with, or going for a visit to a new location. In pursuing these discovery-oriented activities, the coach found opportunities to teach skills; for example, how to send an email and make a follow-up phone call to get an appointment with a financial aid officer at a community college; how to prepare for the appointment by making a list of questions and deciding how to record information, etc.

After the plenary session, the remainder of the conference was spent with participants separating into small groups for focused activities and discussions, and then reassembling as a larger group to share key points. For each small group discussion or activity, attendees were asked to fill out a worksheet. Blank worksheets for each small group session are included in Appendix C. Each small group was facilitated by a Pathways staff member, assisted by a note taker who was either a graduate student or a Pathways staff member. The facilitators were given guides with very specific directions about what would be discussed during the session, and what would be reported out to the larger group. One or two Pathways staff members were assigned as note takers during the sessions in which the small groups reported out to the large groups. The sections of these Proceedings that report on the conference discussions are based on the worksheets (completed by participants) and on notes of key points raised in the small and large groups.