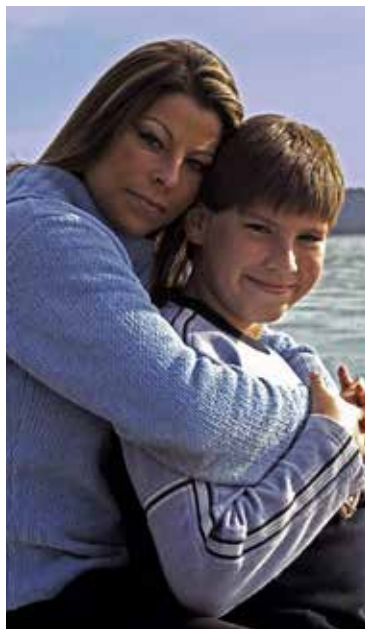


Session 3:

Instrumental Social Support



Description of the Activity

Participants were assigned to one of six groups. Each group included an assigned facilitator plus at least two young adults. The remaining participants were assigned to the tables more or less randomly.

This activity was conducted in a “speed dating” format. The session facilitator distributed a worksheet with three questions addressing instrumental social support to each participant. Each participant paired off with another in their group to answer the first question. After ten minutes, participants found a different partner to answer the second question within a ten-minute time frame and yet another partner to answer the third question. During each question asking period, participants filled out a section of the session worksheet. No other notes were taken to document the process.

Question 1: *One form of social support is “instrumental”—people you know who give you or link you to things you need. Please think about your life between the ages of 16 and 26 or so, and a time when someone you knew helped you get a job, find a place to live, learn or do something new, or explore a new direction in your life. Many people have lots of examples, so if you have several, pick one that had an especially important impact.*

- Most people responded that they were helped by a family member (n=14) or friend (n=14). Teacher/employer was mentioned by 6 participants and 8 said that some “other” type of person who helped them. Examples included foster parent, sponsor, and IL (independent living) worker.
- Regarding the type of help sought, most were looking for support in getting a job (n=15) or more education (n=14). Five people sought help looking for a place to live and 7 others sought help for other reasons such as obtaining money, finding strengths, and gaining sobriety.
- Responses indicated that most of these support people offered to help (n=22), whereas 12 respondents stated that they asked for the help themselves. Only 3 had someone ask for them, and three others mentioned some other way of getting the support.
- On a scale of 1-10 regarding how significant of an impact this support had on the person, the average rating was 9.1. Therefore, this support had significant impact on the participants.

Question 2: *Providers often work with young people to identify people they already know who can help them get a job, find a place to live, learn or do something new, etc. Provide an example that you know about in detail when a provider intentionally helped a young person connect with someone they already knew to get instrumental social support of the kind we just talked about.*

- The person most often identified to provide instrumental support was a family member (9 immediate members, 2 extended), followed by a teacher/employer (n = 4). Friends (n=3), friends of friends (n=3) and family friends

(n=2) were also mentioned. However, many participants (n=14) stated that a person in a different category helped them; these people varied, but included mentors, community members, and service providers.

- The most common type of instrumental support received was job related, more specifically getting a job (n=15); 5 people also reported receiving help getting more education and two people received support finding a place to live. However, many (n=16) sought support for a category they defined within the “other” option; these supports included getting involved in a hobby (e.g., horseback riding, wrestling, theater), (re)connecting with family members, and accessing services.
- Overall, these support experiences were seen as positive with 21 participants stating the experience was “really positive” and another 12 seeing it as “somewhat positive.” Two people stated the experience was neutral, and one person each stated that the experience was “somewhat negative” or “really negative.”
- Although we asked about specific activities that were used to facilitate this support, few were identified (Take Charge for the Future,^{32,33} eco mapping³⁴). People mentioned “networking” and talking.

Question 3: *Providers often work with young people to connect them with people they don’t already know but who can help them get a job, find a place to live, learn or do something new, etc. Provide an example that you know about in detail when a provider intentionally helped a young person connect with someone new to get social support of the kind we just talked about.*

- There were varied responses as to whom the

person was connected with. The most common response was an older peer or mentor (n=8), followed by a service provider (n=5). However, members of academe, employers, youth groups, and friends of friends were among some of the other parties with whom connections were formed by participants.

- The support received was most likely addressing either employment (n=12) or education (n = 11). Two people stated they received support in finding a place to live. A substantial number of people stated that they received other types of instrumental support (n = 13) such as mental health treatment (3), or getting more involved in leadership, advocacy, or youth programs (4).
- The majority (n=26) of participants stated that the overall impact of connecting to this person was “really positive” with another 9 stating that the impact was “somewhat positive.” One participant stated that there was no impact.
- When asked how often participants thought this happened, most participants (n=17) stated they believed it happened “sometimes”; 10 stated they felt it happened “a lot” and 9 believed it happened “not that often”; one stated this happened rarely.

Reflections

- For the most part, it appears that people seek support in finding a job or getting an education.
- They get support from family members, friends—even in the category of people they don’t know, mentors and peers were mentioned, along with advisers and mental health professionals and staff of organizations; people that they may have already known. So, reaching out to complete strangers does not seem to happen that often in this sample.
- Overall, these connections are positive. The more remote ones perhaps don’t happen enough. Can something more be done about this?
- These connections are often about expanding horizons (especially among those who chose the “something new/other” category)—getting involved in the community, connecting to other adults, or getting inner strength and growth.
- Very few tools were mentioned to help with a process like this. They either don’t exist or people are not aware of them.