

**ENGAGING  
&  
SUPPORTING YOUNG  
ADULTS  
MHAO PEER EMPLOYMENT  
SPECIALIST TRAINING**

## **PRESENTED BY:**

**Kris Kuchinka – young adult with lived experience.**

**Jo-Ann Sowers – Career Visions Project, Pathways  
to Positive Futures Project, Portland State  
University**



# A BIT ABOUT KRIS

- I am a 25 year old young man who grew up in Portland, Oregon. I graduated from Portland Christian High School and was an honors student. I worked for many years at Standard Appliance as an inventory control specialist. I am engaged to be married in September to the love of my life.
- I recognized that I experienced mental health challenges beginning in high school, including issues of depression and mania as well as PTSD surrounding my fathers death, but was too embarrassed to admit to these or to seek assistance. I experienced my first significant mental health symptoms that required services when I was 19 years of age. I was diagnosed with BiPolar with psychotic features. I also experience significant OCD and Panic Disorder.
- I have gone through the Washington State peer support certification program. I also am familiar with peer supports because my fiancé is a leader in young adult peer supports in the State of Washington.
- My ambition in my teens was to be an English professor or a psychologist and now , in part as a result of my participation in the Career Visions Project I have adapted my career goals—I will share more about this later.



# EMERGING ADULTHOOD: UNIQUE CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Young adults in their early to late 20 and who experience significant mental health conditions have characteristics and experiences which are unique:

- They are at a developmental stage which has been described as “emerging adulthood” when the expectation is for them to more fully adopt independent adult roles than during when they were younger. This is the time when most “typical” young adults begin to seriously think about, plan for and take steps that will establish their career paths (Arnett, 2004).
- Many young adults received their diagnoses and/or began seeking assistance for mental health issues for the first time during their 20s—their career dreams, plans, and activities may have been disrupted. Others may have been “treading water” since leaving high school and/or the child system, and now recognize the need for assistance in order to move forward (Sowers, 2013).

# FROM THE STANDPOINT OF AN EMERGING ADULT

- **The time after high school is a very confusing time:**
    - There are many expectations from family and friends
    - Varied opinions on how to succeed at those expectations
    - Understanding about what the individual is going through is sometimes not present.
  - **Suddenly, the emerging adult:**
    - Feels like an underachiever
    - Watches their life screech to a halt as their peers continue to succeed and carve out their own places in the “adult world”
    - Wonders where they have gone wrong, especially if they are used to be successful in their pursuits as teenagers
    - Carries around the shame of unmet expectations and aspirations that haven’t gone anywhere
  - **Life at this age is tough enough without having to battle a mental health issue**
- 

# ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING YOUNG ADULTS

- Peer supports needs to be made to fit all ages and walks of life. By making it accessible and welcoming, emerging adults will have the opportunity to impress you with the talents they have.
- Peer Employment Specialists should proactively encourage young adult peers to engage with peer supports, including by placing pamphlets at colleges and youth organizations, encouraging younger peers to be Peer Employment Specialists, creating and/or using spaces at which young adults will feel comfortable, and meeting younger peers where they “naturally” feel comfortable such as coffee shops.
- Believe in the potential that young adults have and find it!

# REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE A YOUNG ADULT

- **Remember that much of what a young adult does or doesn't do often has more to do with their age, rather than the fact that they experience a mental health challenge.**
- Young adults are willing to be supported by older peers, but Peer Employment Specialists must be particularly nonjudgmental with these peers—if they sense any judgment of their lifestyle they will not continue to engage with you.

# PARENTS

Many young adults continue to live with their parents and are struggling to gain their independence. It is important for Specialists to respect the family's role, but to make it clear to all that you are supporting the young adult as an adult.

Also, take care to not “mother”, “father”, or parent the young adult—regardless of how old you are and young they are. Some young adults may seek this—but this is not your role.



# POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

- Returning to, beginning, or completing postsecondary education is often very important to young adults.
  - Peers may need support to regain their confidence to go to or return to school.
  - Peer Employment Specialist need to become very familiar with postsecondary opportunities and resources in their communities, and how to support peers to successfully access these resources including colleges and technical schools and the programs offered there, agencies that fund postsecondary education and training, disability support office staff, etc.
- 

# GED

Of course, some young adults had to or chose to leave high school prior to graduation and now wish to obtain their GED.

Peer Employment Specialists should be very familiar with programs which offer GED completion assistance in their communities.



# CAREER PLANNING

- Some young adults need encouragement and support to return to their original career dreams and goals.
  - Others may wish to and need to be encouraged and supported to identify different career dreams – just as good as their original goals and perhaps an even better match to their strengths.
- 

# PRACTICAL GOAL SEEKING SKILLS & SUPPORTS

- Many young adults, with and without disabilities, need to learn and need support to use basic skills that will allow them to move forward such as breaking goals into steps and timelines, checking off on steps completed, routinely reviewing their progress, reinforcing themselves for taking steps, keeping a calendar, writing resumes, doing informational interviews, making career goals decisions based on research, etc.
  - Peer Employment Specialists should play a key role in helping to teach young peers these skills and supporting them as they use them to achieve their goals.
- 

# BENEFITS

- Some young adults are being encouraged by family and professionals to seek Social Security whereas others have just recently received this benefit.
  - As with anyone, Peer Employment Specialists need to help those who receive Social Security to understand that they can work and maintain their benefits.
  - Peer Employment Specialists may wish to encourage young adults who are not Social Security recipients to delay seeking assistance until they are very sure that they will need it.
- 

# RESOURCES

- YouthMOVE
  - WorkSource—youth and young adult targeted services.
  - Pathways to Positive Futures—PSU
  - Career Visions Project
  - Early Assessment and Support Alliance (EASA)
- 

# YOUTH M.O.V.E.

Youth M.O.V.E. Oregon is a youth led, state-wide organization devoted to improving the services and systems that support the positive growth and development of youth and young adults in our community by uniting the voices of individuals who have lived through and experienced various problems with systems including (but not limited to) mental health, juvenile justice, education, and child welfare. Our project began as a demonstration project funded by the Federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Program.

<http://www.youthmoveoregon.net/>



# WORKSOURCE SERVICES TARGETED TO YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS

<http://www.worksourceoregon.org/13-24-years-old>

WorkSource Oregon is particularly committed to services for youth and young adults. This website is a great resource for young adult peers and Peer Employment Specialists. The specific programs offered vary from community to community.



# PATHWAY TO POSITIVE FUTURES WEBSITE

Pathways is being conducted at Portland State University and maintains a website with very useful information and resources related to youth and young adults with mental health challenges.

<http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/>



# CAREER VISIONS PROJECT

- To evaluate how effective the Career Visions program is for helping young adults (20 to 30 years of age) with significant mental health challenges to:
  - Increase their confidence that they can work in a career or job which fits their strengths and desires, and which provides them with the opportunity to be as self-sufficient as possible
  - To learn information and skills they can use to take the lead in choosing their career/job goals, planning how they will achieve their goals, and taking steps to achieve their goals.
- 

## **EARLY ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT ALLIANCE (EASA)**

**EASA uses evidence-based practices to do early assessment and intervention for young adults having their first experience with psychosis. Its primary purpose is to reduce the disability associated with psychosis. EASA offers early, effective care for schizophrenia and related disorders, through clinical teams. EASA offers supported employment services. (<http://www.oregon.gov/oha/amh/pages/services/easa/main.aspx>)**

