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Transition of Secondary Students with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

**Current Approaches
for Positive Outcomes**

SECOND EDITION

Edited by Douglas Cheney

Research Press 2612 North Mattis Avenue, Champaign, Illinois 61822
(800) 519-2707 www.researchpress.com

CHAPTER 10

The RENEW Model of Futures Planning, Resource Development, and School-to-Career Experiences for Youth with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

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Resiliency does not come from some rare or special qualities, but from everyday magic of ordinary . . . human resources in . . . children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities.

—Masten (2001, p. 235)

Young people with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD) often lack access to the personal, social, family, and community resources that are available to typical youth. In addition, the needs and characteristics of adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders are complex, multidimensional, and often resistant to change. These complex and individualized needs make it difficult for communities, systems, organizations, and individuals to respond effectively and assist youth with EBD to be successful. Effective interventions for youth with EBD must be flexible and focused on engagement of the youth “where they are at” and should include self-determination skill building, resource building, and relationship development. The RENEW (Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural Supports, Education, and Work) model was developed in New Hampshire in 1996 and is designed to address the

unique needs of youth with EBD. Youth who received RENEW services have experienced positive outcomes when compared to the outcomes documented in the research on youth with EBD. This chapter describes the magnitude of the problem of poor secondary transition outcomes for youth with EBD, the logic and features of the RENEW model, the contexts in which RENEW has been implemented, and the evidence to suggest the efficacy of the RENEW approach.

POOR TRANSITION OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH WITH EBD

Certain individual characteristics common among youth with EBD impede their engagement and success in school, including academic challenges and social and behavioral skill difficulties (Cullinan & Sabornie, 2004; Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004; Sabornie, Cullinan, Osborne, & Brock, 2005). To complicate matters, youth with EBD also tend to be poorer and to have family stressors at far greater rates than do typical students or students in other disability subgroups (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). Students with EBD show patterns of school disengagement, high rates of academic failure, high dropout rates, high criminal justice involvement, and somewhat lower employment rates (Bullis & Cheney, 1999; Kortering, Hess, & Braziel, 1996; Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Wagner, 1991; Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, & Epstein, 2005; Wehman, 1996; Zigmond, 2006). Studies have also shown that youth with EBD have high rates of mental health utilization, are more likely to be poor, and are incarcerated at significantly higher rates than the general population (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Kortering & Braziel, 1998; Lee & Burkam, 2001; Wagner, 1991; Wagner et al., 2003; Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, & Epstein, 2005). Despite efforts to address the educational needs of youth with EBD in regular education settings, youth with emotional disturbance typically receive their education services outside of the typical classroom at far greater rates than other students with disabilities, and they are placed in segregated educational settings at four times the rate of other students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2006; Wagner & Davis, 2006).

Schools or the special education system alone cannot address the needs of all young people with EBD. The typical large public high school is not geared to provide service coordination and linkage to other

community resources, and the support needs of young people with emotional or behavioral disabilities are not typically limited to the challenges posed by their disability (Bullis & Paris, 1996). Many of these young people face instability in their residential life, poverty, and alcohol abuse at home, and learning disabilities that contribute to the difficulty of “blending in” and becoming a member of the high school environment.

Given that many young people with EBD tend to be disengaged from family, school, and community support systems, it is logical to conclude that they are not accessing the secondary transition services that may help them to successfully complete high school, continue with postsecondary education programs, find employment, obtain stable and safe housing, and connect to needed support services. As a result of their lack of engagement in typical educational and social service programs and supports, many youth with EBD do not develop self-determined skills and behaviors, and many do not have the academic and vocational experiences that can make learning relevant and lead to desired postschool outcomes (Lane & Carter, 2006; Waggoner & Davis, 2006).

SETTING THE STAGE: PARADIGM SHIFTS ACROSS MULTIPLE SYSTEMS

RENEW, first developed in New Hampshire as part of a research and demonstration project and continued as a program of a nonprofit corporation and university collaboration (Bullis & Cheney, 1999; Malinowski & Cormier, 2004), focuses on the multiple and individualized needs and challenges posed by youth with serious emotional and behavioral challenges that have been identified in the research.

The development and initial implementation of the RENEW model in 1996 was a reflection of the changing values and paradigms in special education, regular education, child welfare, and mental health systems. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) created a new emphasis on inclusion and access to typical education services and supports for all students with disabilities and, in 1990, the IDEA amendments required schools to develop outcome-based transition plans for students with disabilities beginning at age 14 (now age 16). The picture of inclusion was complicated by the IDEA amendments

1997 that put forth stipulations for the removal from school and education requirements of students with disabilities who have committed serious behavioral infractions. These rules put a spotlight on the difficulties faced by and the disengagement of many youth with EBD from schools because of the disciplinary problems they often experience.

The special education transition rules are designed to address the poor outcomes of all youth with disabilities and to assist students with disabilities and their families in planning for post-high school life. Secondary transition services are defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) as a coordinated set of activities for students with disabilities that would facilitate postschool participation and outcomes. Although the emphasis on secondary transition services for youth with disabilities has yielded improved academic outcomes for certain groups, youth with emotional or behavioral disabilities have gained little from these initiatives during the past 15 years (Wagner & Davis, 2006).

Within the education community, The School-to-Work Opportunities (STWO) Act of 1994 represented significant reform in high-school academic and career-focused education programs. The STWO fostered the notions of "outcome-based" career development and identified a variety of strategies in the framework of work- and school-based learning and activities to connect these two learning contexts. School-to-work activities created alliances between schools and the business community and allowed school districts to think about and recognize the value of hands-on learning in real-world settings (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). The innovations of the School-to-Work initiative were somewhat blunted by the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. NCLB pointed to the persistent achievement gap between typical students and certain subgroups, including children with disabilities, African American children, Hispanic children, and children from low-income families. The educational emphasis has thus been on increasing the academic achievement of all students, with a focus on rigorous but traditional academic instruction and delivery models.

As these major education reforms took place, a conceptual shift in the delivery of community mental health care for children and youth was also occurring. This shift recognizes that children with emotional and behavioral disorders and their family members need a broad array

of services in order to keep those children in their homes and h communities (Eber & Keenan, 2004; Stroul & Friedman, 1986). result of this shift in thinking about what works for children and f lies at risk, community mental health service provision is changing: a medical treatment model to a set of community-based intervent with the goal of supporting children in living in their home commi nities or returning home from placements. These reforms have resu in the development and proliferation of family- and student-foc wraparound services that center on the goals and needs of the fa and child and engage community-based and natural supports (Burch Bruns, & Burchard, 2002; Eber, 2003).

With an emphasis on inclusion, self-determination, child-cent wraparound, and individualized, natural supports, these policy paradigm shifts have spurred the development of research and der stration projects aimed to create pragmatic community-based opt for the educational and positive social development of youth with most significant challenges. Researchers in the field of secondary sition and employment recommend that secondary transition ser for youth with EBD have a vocational focus, include "real-wc learning, be highly individualized, and be strengths-based (E Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997; Bullis, Nishioka-Evans, Frederick Davis, 1993; Wagner & Davis, 2006). In addition, youth with EBD to develop their self-determination skills and experiences, which inc having opportunities to set goals, make decisions, problem-solve, seek help (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006; Eisenman, 20 Researchers advocate that youth with EBD receive individualized op that assist them in completing their secondary education in alterna community-based environments (Kutash & Duchnowski, 1997). T alternative models make use of any and all learning environment: flexible and individualized in community-based curricula, link lear to employment, and pull together multiple agencies, systems, resou and plans so young people can use the resources effectively. T models promote self-direction and self-determination. The studer these models remain connected to and receive their diplomas from home school districts, or they receive General Education Develop (GED) diplomas. The students in these models do not receive education in alternative schools.

THE RENEW MODEL: CREATING OPTIONS FOR YOUTH

RENEW is one example of an individualized community-based approach that meets the multiple and complex needs of youth with EBD, including the needs for developing self-determination skills and experiences, for connectedness to the education process, for connectedness to community resources, and for experiencing personal success.

Five Principles of RENEW

RENEW is based on the philosophy that all youth can succeed with the proper supports, treatments, and services. As such, the RENEW model is designed to meet the known needs of youth with emotional and behavioral disorders, using the following principles to guide the practice:

Principle 1: Self-Determination. Self-determined behavior includes choice making, decision making, problem solving, self-management, and self-advocacy (Carter et al., 2006; Wehmeyer, 2005). The young person is given guidance and support to reach his or her stated and “socially valued” goals. The skills to state one’s preferences and hopes, knowing one’s limitations and support needs, and defining the best pathway toward reaching one’s goals become an integral part of the RENEW process.

Principle 2: Community Inclusion. Community inclusion is steeped in the belief that the best and most reliable services and supports are those that are provided naturally in one’s chosen community, and that it should be a priority of RENEW to work toward building, supporting, and filling in gaps in order for those natural supports to be effective.

Principle 3: Unconditional Care. Unconditional care means that no specific behavioral criteria are required of the young person in order to qualify for and receive RENEW services. Youth with EBD need to learn that people will stay connected with them regardless of their actions and behaviors, and each youth receives support from the RENEW project to take responsibility for his or her actions.

Principle 4: Strengths-Based Services. Strengths-based planning and service provision allows for a focus on what the young person *can*

do, as opposed to a focus on what he or she fails to do well. The focus is on skills, preferences, likes, dislikes, and gaps, in order to build capacity and a positive concept of self (“success breeds success”).

Principle 5: Flexible Resources. Flexible resource planning and development means that the RENEW facilitator helps the young person to identify exactly what he or she needs for supports and to ask for help. It requires an extensive knowledge of the neighborhood, community, agency, and community resource rules and relations. The agencies are asked to provide support in a way that meets the young person’s needs, as opposed to an emphasis on the young person meeting the criteria of the agency to obtain supports.

Four Goals of RENEW

There are four outcomes, or measurable goals, that the RENEW program is designed to accomplish with every young person:

Goal 1: High-School Completion. High-school completion is a significant achievement, in light of the poor high-school completion rates among youth with EBD. If the youth has not already graduated high school, the facilitator works with him or her toward high school completion or graduation with a credential (a regular diploma, a GED, an adult education diploma, or local option diploma).

Goal 2: Employment. Employment in a typical job for competitive wages is extremely critical to the young person’s transition to adulthood, and having a job is an important step to build confidence, self-determination, and self-efficacy. Many social resources become accessible through a person’s job (bosses, coworkers, mentors), and the workplace offers significant learning opportunities for building social, career-related, and academic skills. Finding the value of a paycheck and having one’s own money cannot be overstated.

Goal 3: Postsecondary Education and Training. Many of the most competitive jobs at livable wages require postsecondary education and training. Most youth with EBD indicate that they would like to receive postsecondary training or to attend college when they finish high school, and they will typically need substantial support and

in the process of applying, developing financial support, and making the transition for youth who have postsecondary education goals.

Goal 4: Community Inclusion. Community inclusion is the final planned RENEW outcome. Youth with EBD are often isolated from the people, community organizations, and agencies that can support them and help them to achieve their goals. The RENEW process seeks to identify and connect each RENEW participant to the people, places, and services in their community that will help them now and in the future to attain their goals and keep moving forward.

Eight Strategies of RENEW

There are eight primary strategies in the RENEW “toolbox,” and the strategies are chosen based on the young person’s goals and needs.

Strategy 1: Personal Futures Planning

Various models for person-centered planning exist, including the McGill Action Planning System, or MAPS (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992; Vandercook, York, & Forest, 1989), Personal Futures Planning (Mount, 2000), Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) (Pearpoint, O’Brien, & Forest, 1987), and various hybrids such as those employed by Cotton in *Elements of Design* (2003). Person-centered planning has been used primarily for planning around major life transitions for individuals with developmental disabilities, but it is more recently being used with elders and with youth in transition from high school to adult life. RENEW is one of the few models we know of that uses person-centered planning for youth with emotional and behavioral challenges.

The goal of the futures planning process is to help the young person create a meaningful, personalized, individualized plan, based on a conversation that captures the vision in the young person’s words. This is done by “mapping” (1) his or her current situation, (2) elements from past experiences (increasing self-knowledge and awareness), (3) experiences that have been positive and those that have not worked well, (4) the young person’s social network and other resources (to identify the supports and personal resources that can be leveraged to support the person’s goals), (5) goals, dreams, and wishes (just as for typical youth, the courage to dream is a rite of passage for adolescents), (6) the chal-

lenges or possible roadblocks (to account and plan for problems), and (7) a detailed strategy or action plan (planning and implementing). The process, when conducted well, builds self-determination, unlike traditional service-planning processes, which are focused on agency needs, compliance (IEPs, for example), and treatment. As noted by Eisenman (2007):

Theory, research, and practice have suggested that to keep youth in school, educators must encourage students' perceived competence and self-determination. They can do this by teaching students the component skills of self-determination in autonomy-supportive school environments and by helping students to apply their developing self-determination skills to self-identified goals. (p. 3)

The RENEW facilitator ensures that the futures plan is often revisited and revised. These experiences with person-centered planning have yielded positive changes in self-perceptions, motivation, interest, and engagement of youth with EBD. The goals are rarely unrealistic. What is often most helpful and instructive for the facilitator and other support persons is a list of resources that are available to the young person.

Strategy 2: Alternative Education Options

Flexible education programming is often necessary to help each youth successfully complete a high-school program. There is a continuum of options—from simple solutions such as using a computer-based credit recovery program, changing classes, or testing out of a class, to more creative options such as gaining credit for a work-based internship or enrolling in vocational classes, to more radical options such as enrolling in an alternative or adult education program or taking the GED option. The facilitator helps the youth identify the preferred option and enlists the help of others to make it work.

Strategy 3: School-to-Career Transition Strategies

A school-to-career transition framework focuses on the needs of adolescents with EBD for connectedness to school-based and work-based experiences as part of a coherent, "results-oriented" process of transition from

school to adult life. The person-centered plan is a critical focal point to drive the secondary transition planning and program. Once a young person has identified what he or she wants to do and is good at doing and has developed post-high school goals (such as college, employment, and other goals), an individualized plan for the school-to-career transition is developed.

RENEW facilitators use the school-to-career framework for career development and education, including school- and work-based learning experiences and connecting activities, to create successful transition experiences for each youth. School-based learning experiences can include, in addition to traditional academic classes, participation in vocational classes and programs, independent study, extended learning opportunities, alternative classes or programs, classes in college, adult education classes, community education classes, and enrichment classes, among others. Work-based learning opportunities can include internships, informational interviews, job-shadow experiences, paid work experiences, apprenticeships, vocational classes tied to employment, on-the-job mentoring, and volunteer opportunities. The connecting activities are critical to the success of any school-to-work plan and may include career guidance and counseling services, vocational exploration classes and activities, mentoring and tutoring programs, and life-skills classes (personal financial management, for example), among others. The RENEW facilitator plays the role of “connector” or “broker” for each youth and must know of the available career-related programs and resources in the school and the community, including the guidance, career counseling, academic, and specialized programs.

Strategy 4: Naturally Supported Employment

Working is an important experience for any youth. Jobs help young people learn about real-world expectations and are important as youth prepare for adult independent living. In addition to work experiences that offer high-school and college credit, youth with EBD should have opportunities for jobs after school and on weekends, just like most adolescents. A job provides the opportunity to learn about obtaining and managing money, test certain skills and abilities, and develop relationships and community connections with a new set of peers and

adults. The RENEW facilitator often helps the young person use the connections in his or her “resource network” (relatives, friends, teachers) to gain access to job opportunities. If necessary and appropriate, the facilitator connects the youth with the state vocational rehabilitation agency for assistance with postsecondary education and supports, job development, on-the-job supports, and other career-related services that can bridge the gap between high-school resources and adult independence. The RENEW facilitator also works with the youth to plan for and build in important workplace supports, including an on-the-job mentor or contact person, linkages to transportation to and from work, and benefits counseling (to ensure that the job does not interfere with eligibility for critical income and insurance programs such as Supplemental Security Income or Medicaid). Finally, just as most adolescents frequently changes jobs, the appropriate process of leaving one job and finding the next is explained, or if necessary, facilitated by the RENEW facilitator.

Strategy 5: Individualized Resource Development

The process of identifying the needed supports and resources begins with the person-centered plan. During the planning sessions, the RENEW facilitator works to elicit from the young person—and the people who best know the young person—a profile of the resources (human, social, financial, family, community, system) currently available to him or her. Human resources include the experiences, strengths, capabilities, and talents possessed by the young person (for example, perhaps the student is a talented guitar player). Family resources include those possessed by parents, siblings, aunts, and uncles, such as what they do for work, their volunteer activities, what they do for fun, their education, and where they live, among other valuable assets. Social resources include the connections the young person has with family members, neighbors, peers, teachers, coworkers, bosses, social workers, counselors, juvenile probation officers, and others who are valued by the young person and whom he or she wants to use to provide critical connections and supports. System resources include services and supports available from the school, the mental health clinic, and the local vocational rehabilitation office, among others. The RENEW facilitator has knowledge of these community resources and knows how to

make new resource connections based on the goals expressed by the young person and the list of needed support and services.

Strategy 6: Individually Developed Teams

The development of resources for each student is deliberately and specifically geared to the needs of the young person—not of the system—and often requires a great deal of creativity, negotiation, and asking. Additionally, the development of the young person’s “team” is based on need. Individuals are invited to be part of the team because they have a critical role to play in the successful completion of the young person’s plan (as identified by the young person). The team for RENEW is not the individualized education program (IEP) team, but is, instead, an invited group of people who are willing and able to help.

The systems encountered by and that support youth with EBD, including special education, regular education, mental health, vocational rehabilitation, child welfare, juvenile justice, and others, are driven by eligibility requirements and service processes that may or may not be in sync with the model of self-determination and school-to-work transition. One challenge for a RENEW facilitator, then, is to find the people who will offer solutions and overcome barriers. Interagency collaboration is an oft-used phrase, but in RENEW it means that all the involved systems and supports are “on the same page” as the young person and are working toward the young person’s stated goals. Part of the RENEW service is thus focused on effective team building and communication.

Strategy 7: Mentoring

Many youth with EBD lack relationships with older youth and adults that can be critical to their development, and mentoring can be an effective strategy to build the social connections lacking in the lives of many young people with emotional or behavioral difficulties (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). The problem is that “mentoring for the sake of mentoring” does not focus on the development of longer-term social resources. In the RENEW model, mentors are intentionally developed to help the young person make valuable new social connections, build social and career skills, and develop a positive sense of self. Mentors are often

connected to youth in RENEW based on mutual educational and career interest and are never forced. The role of the RENEW facilitator is to identify and connect individuals who naturally possess the characteristics admired by the youth with EBD. The mentor is also part of the communication loop, if not an active member of the youth's team.

Strategy 8: Sustainable Community Connections

When they finish high school or "age out" of the children's service system, most youth with EBD lose the cocoon of supports they received while in secondary school or a placement program. The RENEW facilitator looks to develop planned experiences in natural settings to allow each youth the opportunity to develop and learn prosocial skills and make potentially valuable community-based connections while still receiving support from adults and the service system. Despite the youth's disability and how the disability is manifested (in behavior and symptoms), and within the limits of any functional impairments, the RENEW model aims to help community members to understand how ecological factors can be manipulated or changed in order to ensure success and to support the youth. Social skills are thus developed by RENEW in the context of naturally occurring interactions (on the job, in the classroom, at the gym) through education, positive recognition, and supports.

RENEW IMPLEMENTATION

RENEW was first developed and implemented as a federally funded model demonstration project in Manchester, New Hampshire, described in the 2000 U. S. Census as a blue-collar city of approximately 100,000, primarily white, residents. Among the empowerment zone's 7,015 residents, however, 19% of the people are nonwhite, and half speak English as a second language. The RENEW project staff were employed and supported by Keene State College and the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire and were initially located at the Manchester Community Technical College, a normative setting for young people who are interested in advancing their employment.

The RENEW model was designed by the project staff with input from an interagency advisory team. This interagency team included

representatives from the state's National Alliance for the Mentally Ill affiliate; a vocational rehabilitation agency; the community technical college; the Manchester School District, the state Division of Behavioral Health, the state Division of Children, Youth and Families; the Manchester mental health agency; and the Child and Family Services agency. The project team developed the model by incorporating best practices and strategies from a variety of disciplines, including child welfare, community mental health (wraparound), school-to-work (innovative crediting using work-based learning strategies), and developmental disabilities (personal futures planning) in order to create a comprehensive, flexible service that was built around five principles, four goals, and eight strategies (Cheney, Hagner, Malloy, Cormier, & Bernstein, 1998; Malloy, Cheney, & Cormier, 1998).

Settings Where RENEW Services Have Been Provided

The primary resource needed to provide RENEW is a highly trained facilitator who is knowledgeable and skilled in person-centered planning facilitation, alternative educational models and school-to-career strategies, employment supports, community-based services and supports, team building and facilitation, and best practices in counseling. The services are provided in natural settings such as in high school, in the home, at work, and in the community. The facilitator must work to engage the youth and build trust, a component within the experiences of youth with EBD that is often missing.

RENEW services have been provided in various organizational contexts and settings. The first RENEW facilitators were supported by grant funds, trained and supervised by university research staff, and operated independently of typical youth-serving organizations and systems. When the grant ended, the project staff and the advisory committee created a nonprofit corporation, the Alliance for Community Supports, and established contracts and fee-for-service agreements with the local mental health center, the vocational rehabilitation agency, and several school districts. The Alliance for Community Supports continued to expand its fee-for-service base and its relationship with the university, providing RENEW services to adjudicated youth in a "community reentry" grant-funded project (Hagner, Malloy, Mazzone, & Cormier, 2008), and as part of two schoolwide systems

change dropout prevention projects. More recently, university and Alliance for Community Supports staff have developed a model for training school counselors and community mental health therapists to provide RENEW to at-risk students in several New Hampshire communities.

Eligibility and Enrollment

The original RENEW demonstration project established three primary criteria for eligibility for services: (1) the youth is between the ages of 16 and 21, inclusive, (2) the youth has an emotional disability as defined by a psychiatrist, psychologist, or other health or mental health practitioner (either as a primary or secondary diagnosis), and (3) the youth lives in the greater Manchester area. The project team rejected behavioral "readiness," eligibility criteria, or behavioral requirements that are often required by traditional agencies in the service system. Since the first project, RENEW has been implemented in four subsequent grant-funded projects and as a service of a nonprofit, community-based service provider.

RENEW OUTCOMES

RENEW has been provided as part of several demonstration projects, but it has yet to be subject to a rigorous research design. Most of the outcomes reported here, then, are based on pre- and postintervention data, with promising results.

The First RENEW Demonstration Project

The outcomes for the first RENEW cohort showed promise and led to increased support for fee-for-service contracts and additional grants:

- **High-School Completion:** Between May 1996 and September 1998, 72 youth enrolled in RENEW. At enrollment, 5 of the 72 (7%) had completed high school, and after 3 years, 42 of the 67 (63%) completed high school or its equivalent while in the project. Another 12 students were still in high school and were on course to complete high school by advancing into the next high-school grade (Hagner, Cheney, & Malloy, 1999).

- **Postsecondary Education:** National data show that postsecondary education participation among youth with EBD is 29% (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996), compared to a rate of approximately 50% among typical youth. Of the 42 youth who enrolled in RENEW and who completed high school, 18 (43%) participated in postsecondary programs. Seven of the youth were in 2-year-degree programs at the community technical college, one was a registered plumber's apprentice, and one young woman enrolled in acting classes at a licensed art school while working as an actress and model. Two young people eventually graduated from the community technical college.
- **Employment:** Studies show that youth with EBD are employed at comparable rates to other groups, but the stability of their employment and their pay rates are far short of the norm (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005; Zigmond, 2006). Upon enrollment into the first RENEW project, 15 of the 72 participants were employed (20%). While in RENEW, 71 participants obtained jobs in competitive settings and for typical wages (99%). Participants obtained an average of four jobs per person while in the project. Average wages were \$6.65 an hour, with a range of \$5.25 to \$11.00. Each job obtained lasted an average of 6 weeks. Overall, the RENEW staff helped participants obtain 186 jobs for the 72 youth. Seventy-one of those youth were able to keep at least one of those jobs for more than 3 months.

The Youth Reentry Cohort

Of the 21 participants in the Youth Reentry project who successfully reentered the community, nine (42.9%) returned to their neighborhood high school following detention, eight (38.1%) opted to study for the GED exam, and four (19%) obtained employment without returning to the educational system. Those who returned to their community high school were assisted to design creative alternatives to regular classroom instruction. Four participants completed high school. Two of those students have begun taking college classes. One other participant is combining GED preparation with participation in a registered apprenticeship. Twenty of the project participants residing in the

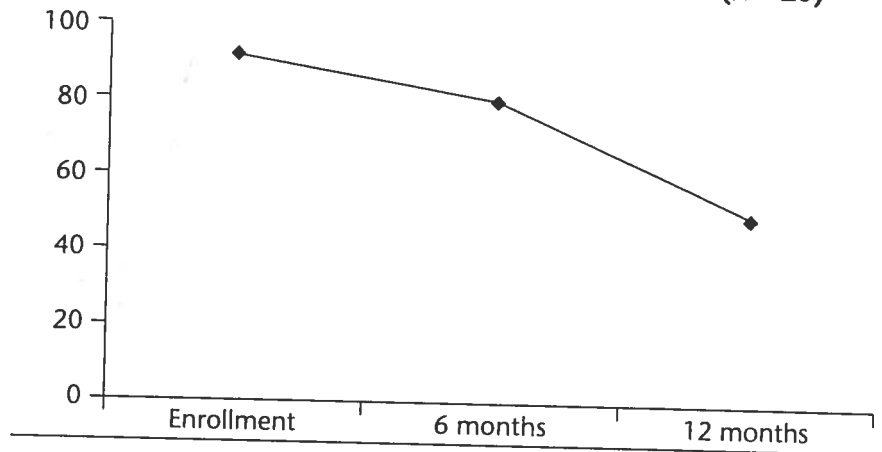
community (74.1%) were employed at the end of the third year (Hagne et al., 2008).

Outcomes for the APEX I Cohort

Of the 46 youth who completed personal futures plans in the first Achievement in Prevention and Excellence (APEX I) project dropout prevention project, nine participants received their high-school diplomas, two participants completed their GED, and three participants not yet eligible to graduate remained enrolled in school but worked independently outside of the school for course credit. Nine youth graduated out of 19 who were eligible, comprising a graduation rate of 47%. Fourteen participants (31%) remained in school classes and were promoted to the next grade level, and 6 (13%) participants re-engaged in some school program, such as vocational programs, adult education, or alternative programs. Four (9%) participants completed futures plans but were in and out of engagement throughout the school year and had no academic change, and 7 (16%) participants completed futures plans but had to discontinue services because they either moved to a new school (4), were placed in youth detention (1), or left to have a baby (2). In addition, the youth who held jobs increased from 37% at intake to 47% at discharge.

APEX included an evaluation of pre- and post-RENEW intervention effects on the functional impairment of a subgroup of 20 participants who received RENEW services and were engaged for at least 1 year. The instrument used to assess functioning was the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS) (Hodges and Wong, 1996; Hodges, Wong, & Latessa, 1998). The CAFAS includes assessment of functioning and interviews with the youth and the parents conducted by a staff member who is trained and certified to administer the CAFAS. The results showed a statistically significant overall improvement in functioning among the 20 youth, with greatest improvement in the school/work, home, moods and emotions, and self-harm domains. There was no change in the behavior toward others, community, substance abuse, and thinking subscales. These results indicate that participation in the RENEW process may have significant positive effects on the students' self-perceptions and their behavior in school and at home (Wells, Malloy, & Cormier, 2006).

FIGURE 10.1 Mean Total CAFAS Scores: APEX Cohort (N = 20)



EXPERIENCES WITH THE RENEW MODEL

RENEW Cohorts

The youth served in the first grant-funded RENEW project were between the ages of 16 and 22 and had a label of serious mental illness or serious emotional disturbance (the state Division of Behavioral Health criteria for community mental health center eligibility for children and youth). During the period April 1996 through September 1998, 72 youth were enrolled in the project. As a group, their mean age was 18 years, 7 months; 51 participants were male, and 21 were female; all were Caucasian. At enrollment, 5 had completed high school or obtained a GED (7%), and only 15 participants (21%) were working. Five participants had concurrent diagnoses of mental retardation, severe learning disability, or cerebral palsy. Seventy-five percent of the youth carried a label of learning disabled on their IEP. Of the 72 participants, 32 received intensive, one-on-one services from the RENEW facilitators.

There were varied disabilities and environmental risk factors among the youth in the first RENEW cohort. For example, 3 enrollees were identified as having a developmental disability in addition to an emotional disturbance, and 57 were living in foster placements, were "homeless," or otherwise not living with their parents when enrolled. Twenty-seven had co-occurring substance abuse issues, and 18 had been identified as having schizophrenia.

Fifty-seven of the project's first cohort (79%) had histories of externalizing behaviors such as assaults or aggression with professionals, family members, and peers; drug and alcohol abuse; and sex offenses. Thirty-six (50%) were involved with the courts or had been involved with the state's Division of Children, Youth and Families, Children in Need of Services or as wards of the state.

Subsequent cohorts of youth for whom we have comprehensive data include the Nashua, New Hampshire, Youth Reentry Project and two high-school dropout prevention projects—APEX I, implemented in two New Hampshire high schools from 2002 to 2005, and APEX II, implemented in 10 New Hampshire high schools (2006–2009). Youth were eligible for the Nashua Youth Reentry project based on the following criteria: (1) they were between the ages of 14 and 17, (2) they were eligible for special education services or were receiving services from the mental health system, and (3) they had been removed from their school and residence for at least 2 weeks due to a charge of delinquency or adjudication as delinquent. Over a 3-year period, 1998–2000, 33 youth completed the futures planning process and engaged in individualized activities with the RENEW facilitator. Of the 33 youth in the reentry project, 66% were identified as having an emotional handicap, 30% a learning disability, and 6% had “other” disabilities.

The youth in the APEX project who received RENEW services were referred by teachers and administrators based on the criteria that they were between the ages of 16 and 22, were at high risk of dropping out of high school, and required individualized supports to move forward and complete their high-school program.

EXAMPLES OF THE RENEW INTERVENTION PROCESS

Engagement and the Personal Futures Planning Process

Self-determination practice with each young person begins with the personal futures planning process. The RENEW facilitators create the culture and context for the futures planning “conversation” that is based on mutual respect and trust. The personal futures plan is the lynchpin for service planning and interagency collaboration. The beauty of the process is that it is designed, directed, and overseen by the young person. Despite the difficult circumstances and discouraging experier

of these youth, all of the project's participants responded positively to the futures planning process and identified dreams and goals for themselves that were realistic and yet, given their circumstances, quite challenging.

All but a handful of RENEW participants were able to present a dream and articulate career-related goals. Several young people said to us, "No one has ever asked me if I had a dream." Similarly, nearly every young person accurately identified his or her barriers and challenges. The very first RENEW participant had a history of violent behavior against teachers, family members, and herself. The facilitator established a rapport and talked with the youth for several weeks before facilitating her futures plan. When asked what her barriers were, the youth said, "I'm afraid I might hurt my grandmother or try to kill myself"—behaviors that she had clearly exhibited and of which she was quite aware. An example of the personal futures planning process can be found in Malloy, Cheney, Hagner, Cormier, and Bernstein (1998).

The personal futures planning process, when conducted with a spirit of respect for the youth's right to self-determination, can significantly change the youth's self-perceptions and self-efficacy, and also change the way the adults view that young person's capabilities and prospects. One high-school student in the APEX project, who has a significant hearing impairment, indicated in her futures plan that she wanted to go into nursing but she was highly frustrated by her lack of progress in school and by lowered expectations of her family members, guidance counselors, and teachers. The futures plan process allowed this student to develop a realistic path toward her dream and gave her a method to communicate this path to people whom she needed to help her. She invited her family members and guidance counselor to a meeting where she presented her plan, and the meeting ended in tears as people realized the power of her dream and her resolve to be successful.

Bringing Resources to the Table

The RENEW facilitators use the comprehensive personal futures plan as an organizing structure for gaining support for and leveraging resources from formal and informal networks. The facilitator often must "assume ownership" of each young person's situation for as long as it takes (typically 12 to 18 months) to develop the plan, organize the team, gain

acceptance and support for the plan among key agencies and individuals, and assist the participants to act on their goals. Team participation is often enthusiastic and positive because the team is focused on the youth's stated goals, rather than an administrative or systems agenda.

The team composition is always individualized depending on the young person's preferences, needs, and situation. Planning does not necessarily occur in large team meetings. The RENEW staff work with each young person (and the parents, if appropriate) to prepare for the IEP, vocational rehabilitation, mental health, or wraparound meetings. This preparation includes rehearsing the presentation of the plan and self-advocacy techniques—what is known as a “pre-meeting.”

With pre-preparation and the development of a strong plan, individuals and entities that are critical to the success of the plans are more likely to be supportive because the youth are well-prepared and able to express their goals and needs effectively. For example, one young woman in the first RENEW project was unable to stay in her high school. At the beginning of the day, she would enter the school by the front door, wave goodbye to her ride, and exit onto the streets by the back door. After her personal futures plan was developed, it was clear that she wanted to graduate from high school and get a job working with disabled children. The student indicated that she needed smaller classrooms, a vocational plan supporting her career dreams, and added support to help her create positive social connections to obtain her diploma. The young woman's plan called for creative thinking and creative funding for education supports not traditionally paid for by the school district. The RENEW facilitator put together a pre-meeting and coached the student and her mother about how to present her plan. The facilitator then helped the young woman and her mother invite the school district case manager, her mental health case manager, a representative from vocational rehabilitation, and her teachers to a wrap-around meeting. When the meeting took place, the young woman felt confident enough to present a convincing case for the changes. The mother was able to support her daughter's goals and advocate for the changes in the IEP in an assured manner. Members of the team took responsibility to help her. The school department agreed to pay for classes at Second Start (a school with smaller classes and instruction geared for individuals with learning disabilities) Her mother agreed to pay for extra tutoring after school to increase her daughter's reading

skills. The vocational specialist agreed to be available for career placement and additional job-related services. The RENEW facilitator agreed to coordinate the activities and to keep everyone up to date. This plan would not have been possible without prior planning and the personal futures plan. The young woman would not have known what she needed, she would not have known how to ask for help, and she would not have been motivated to take action. The parent would not have been as strong an advocate because she would not be aware of what type of services were available to support her daughter, or her rights to request such measures be implemented. When the plan was systematically drawn up, a solution to the situation became viable. In 2000, this young woman graduated from high school.

The involvement of the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is critical to the successes of participants in the RENEW project. All but one of the 72 of youth served in the first RENEW cohort between April 1996 and September 1998 had obtained jobs that lasted for more than 3 months. Jobs obtained were in competitive, employer-supported environments but also include self-employment and registered apprenticeship programs. RENEW staff developed a detailed vocational plan with each participant based on the personal futures plan, consulted with VR counselors about each plan, and developed a process with the VR counselor to identify resources needed to implement the plan.

The RENEW model takes into consideration the needs of the "whole child" as he or she transitions from childhood entitlement programs to adult life and the different systems of support for adults. This transitioning includes consideration of factors such as safe housing, financial and medical support programs, and long-term connections to the community. Two young men in the first RENEW cohort who wanted to live together received assistance from the facilitator to apply and receive approval for Housing and Urban Development Section 8 housing. One was the recipient of the Section 8 payment and the other served as the live-in support person. This mutually reciprocal benefit allowed the two young men to live in a two-bedroom apartment and enhanced their independent living skills. Other participants have applied for and received transitional living and housing for pregnant or single mothers. In all of these situations, RENEW staff worked closely with case managers at the community mental health center to ensure that the young adults are supported in what is, for most, their first move away from their families or guardians.

Completing High School

It is clear that adults with high-school diplomas earn more than do high school noncompleters, and adults with postsecondary education training earn as much as 70% more than high-school graduates (Day & Newburger, 2002). The youth engaged in the RENEW program seem to understand this. All but a handful of youth who worked on their personal futures plan identified high-school completion as a goal, but the challenge for the RENEW facilitator and student is to lay out a plan for high school completion given where the student is today versus the diploma standards and requirements. To address this challenge, the RENEW facilitators work with students to develop a plan for graduation. The process includes (1) consideration of the best type of diploma or equivalent to pursue, (2) an assessment of the number and type of credits needed to complete those diploma or equivalent requirements including an analysis of the school district's flexibility and feasibility of the credits being granted, and (3) the best options for completing necessary work given the young person's learning style, abilities, and motivation to complete the requirements.

The typical requirements for obtaining a high-school diploma are a major barrier for students with challenging emotional or behavioral disabilities. In New Hampshire, guidelines for high-school completion are provided by the state's Department of Education, but local school districts are allowed to require more credits than the state standards and are also given discretion to adopt creative options, such as online courses ("virtual" high school), credit recovery options, adult education for regular credits, and extended learning opportunities, among others. Exceptions to typical diploma requirements often require approval from the school board and individualized approval by the principal. We have found that teachers, guidance counselors, and special education staff are reluctant to apply creative options without assurances and support in place. The personal futures plan, team participation, and good communication often provide the assurances that the staff and administrators need in order to "sign off" on a creative graduation plan.

Occasionally, the RENEW facilitator and student must look at how the transition from an out-of-district placement may affect the credits required and progress toward a high-school diploma. School districts may award credits through state-approved "out of district" program

such as day and residential schools that are located through the state, but alternative programs differ greatly in their academic or vocational focus and services. A student returning to the school district from an alternative program may not receive the specific credits necessary to receive a diploma if requisite in-school requirements have not been met.

The RENEW futures planning process, with the development of various resources to contribute to the plan and the various activities that are geared to the youth's longer-range career goal, can help the school to meet the special education requirement to produce transition plans, beginning at age 16, for students who are eligible for special education services. The transition plan must include written post-high school, outcome-based transition goals and must outline activities related directly to the achievement of the transition goal. The special education rules require authentic student and parent involvement in the development of goals. The transition plans must also include a statement of what the youth will be doing after high school, such as college participation, employment, and independent living. The futures planning process can also be used as a "developmentally appropriate assessment" as required by the special education rules. In fact, we have worked with several special educators to use the personal futures plan as a primary source to construct the youth's IEP and the secondary transition portion of the IEP. For example, one young woman who has multiple health issues and an emotional disorder indicated that she wants to be a nurse or doctor in the coming years. This revelation was a complete surprise to her special education case manager, her guidance counselor, and her mother. Using that goal as a guide, we began to develop a plan for her senior year that included more science courses, college preparation, and connecting with the state vocational rehabilitation agency. We noted for her special education case manager that her futures plan can easily be translated into the school secondary transition plan. The special education case manager said, "Oh, yeah, all I have to do is copy her goals and the plan, tweak it bit, and it's done!"

Most RENEW participants are behind their age-equivalent peers for credits earned. Several students who had already been in high school for 2 or 3 years were so far behind that they would need to attend for another 2 or 3 years in order to graduate. This was not a viable option for any of them, most of whom were 17 or 18 years old. The RENEW facilitators assisted students in looking at "credit recovery" programs,

extended learning opportunities (nonclassroom-based learning opportunities), and options such as the Adult Basic Education (ABE) diploma. The ABE is more flexible because it allows credit to be earned in alternative classes and learning environments. One student in the ABE project had 12 credits of the 26 needed to graduate and had all but given up on the idea of graduating with her peers the following school year. The facilitator, with her guidance counselor and Jobs for New Hampshire Graduates (JAGs) coach, developed a plan that included utilization of PLATO lab (a computer-based program designed for credit recovery) to gain credit for three of the classes in which she was at risk of failing, summer school for two classes for which she could not use credit recovery, online high-school accredited courses through a local community college for two more main courses she did not pass, and a credit for an internship or community service project through her JAGs course the following year. Once the student saw that it was possible for her to graduate with her peers, she became motivated to pursue the rest of her year and took the immediate initiative to sign up for her online courses and PLATO.

A final option for students is the GED. The RENEW staff assist individuals who want to take the GED "pre-test" and help the students study for the final exam. Some participants with significant learning disabilities, however, cannot pass the GED test or high-school classes and are encouraged to work on diplomas through adult basic education. These students appear to profit from hands-on learning situations afforded by work-based learning.

Community colleges provide a "normalized" setting for students to earn credits toward high-school completion and have proved to be an ideal place for youth between the ages of 17 and 21 to finish their diploma requirements. One of RENEW's first participants was nearly 18 years old and four credits short of graduation. He initially attended his high school district's summer school program and received two credits for this work. Summer school was held at the middle school, however, and he did not want to return to the regular high school to get his final two credits. Instead, RENEW staff worked with the school district and obtained approval for him to enroll in community college classes. Although the student did not complete those classes, he did earn two credits in the college's computerized learning laboratory and was able to apply them toward the diploma he received from his high school in August 1997.

One student in the APEX II project, who was far behind in credits and having tremendous difficulty staying engaged in his classes at the high school, explored the option of going to the local technical college to try a hands-on experience with a welding program there. This student began to work harder in high school because going to the technical college was contingent on his grades. After the student showed some success, the high school agreed to support additional classes at the technical school so that he could pursue his core studies as well as his technical training. This student developed a passion for studying in an environment that was more consistent his learning style.

In addition to college classes, students have attended classes at *museum schools, private institutes, and community classes*. For example, one young woman in the first RENEW cohort received help from the vocational rehabilitation agency to pay for her painting and drawing classes at a local private art school and, at the same time, she developed a process with her local high school to obtain credit toward her high-school diploma.

Formal training and internships are an important option for students who engage in the RENEW process. One young man, for example, entered a structured apprenticeship program for plumbers that required 144 hours of classroom instruction and 2,000 hours of on-the-job instruction annually. Another participant worked as a daycare assistant for 135 hours, keeping journals and reading books related to child development. This enabled her to receive the high-school credits she needed to obtain her diploma.

Tutorials and independent study classes help students who do not want to or cannot otherwise attend a class. With the RENEW facilitator's help, students develop a course of study with an instructor, work at their own pace, and meet regularly with the instructor to complete assignments and course objectives. For example, one young man in the first RENEW cohort who wanted to start his own craft business received individualized instruction in woodworking and painting as a part of his postsecondary training. Another young man in an alternative school was having difficulty staying engaged with his biology course because it did not seem relevant to his interests. The student and RENEW facilitator worked with the science teacher, the school curriculum coordinator, and the principal to develop an independent study for the core classes he needed to graduate. The student was interested in massage therapy, and

he agreed to study human anatomy to count for his biology credit. To meet his math credit requirements, he learned about joint angles and other calculations that are important for a massage therapist. This strategy engaged the student and carried over to his senior year, allowing him to graduate on time with his classmates with an adult diploma through the alternative school.

Computer-assisted instruction is a relatively common instructional approach for students enrolled in adult basic education courses and is becoming more common in New Hampshire high schools for “credit recovery.” RENEW has used these programs to help students achieve required academic outcomes and enhance literacy skills. An APEX II student was going into his senior year two credits short of graduating. In a RENEW meeting, the student’s significant other suggested the option of using an accredited, online virtual high school during his last year to make up his two credits after school. The flexible classes would allow him to make up the credits and graduate on time as long as he continued to do well his senior year.

New Hampshire’s community technical college system has joined forces with the Job Training Partnership Act to develop self-paced *GED training, literacy classes, and other classes geared toward the adult population*. Several RENEW participants have used this option and completed required assignments at their own pace. For example, one young man with very significant brain damage due to years of substance abuse (including inhaling butane), had a 2nd-grade reading ability and rudimentary math skills, yet his first goal was to finish high school. The team felt the first order of business was to increase his skills in the basic academic areas. The plan included using the software program of self-guided study toward completion of the GED, taking a community college class in engine repair, and receiving private tutoring for educational support. Six months after his initial enrollment, the young man raised his reading level from 2nd to 8th grade and succeeded in receiving his GED.

Finding creative solutions for high-school completion is a critical feature of the RENEW process and is clearly associated with positive outcomes for youth who would not otherwise graduate from high school. For example, a 17-year-old woman returning from residential treatment wished to complete her high-school education. Her history included several violent acts within school. Her behavior confirmed her

inability to learn within the high-school classroom environment. The team felt a combination of private tutoring and competitive employment would enhance both her academic and job skills. The young woman enrolled in a college-level English course at one of the community technical colleges and was given private tutoring in United States history. She also completed an internship during the summer break. She received high-school credits for these efforts and eventually graduated with honors from her high school.

School-to-Career Activities

Career planning and employment experiences are key predictors of vocational success for transitioning youth (Benz et al., 1997), but they are often a missing link in the educational process for youth with emotional or behavioral disorders. By using the personal futures planning process, most youth talk about future career and immediate employment goals and dreams. Only a few young people did not identify career goals or express an interest in working. In many instances, the RENEW facilitator tries to link the pursuit of a high-school diploma to the youth's employment goals. For example, one young man interested in auto body repair lacked the academic and social-emotional skills to obtain a regular education diploma. He therefore chose to pursue an Adult Basic Education diploma. During the day, he took automotive classes offered at the vocational high school and, in the afternoon, he had a cooperative education job. This decision-making process clearly has vocational implications. Youth with professional aspirations therefore are steered toward high-school degrees, while those with technical or vocational interests pursue ABE diplomas or GED completion.

Internships are paid or unpaid learning situations in business and organizations. Interns study with individuals in a business, usually for limited periods of time. Internships are often established for 2 to 4 weeks so that the student can have experience in a certain occupation without any commitment to the employer. It also allows employers to consider potential employees. One young man, for example, served as a plumber's intern for 6 weeks by studying a curriculum developed between the RENEW staff and the employer. The internship evolved into a registered apprenticeship when the employer accepted the long-term commitment to employ and train the intern.

On-the-job training (OJT) is hands-on training in a specific occupational area for a student employee. In the RENEW process, the need for additional training is typically related to the employee's disability. For example, one young man diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder was given OJT funds from the vocational rehabilitation agency to support the employer's time spent giving the student one-on-one training. The RENEW facilitator works closely with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to develop the employer OJT agreements so that employers can be paid for the hours that they spend training the students. Typically included within OJT is cooperative education.

Cooperative education combines academic or vocational studies with a paid or unpaid job in a related field. For example, one young man combined an office job with business education classes, and a young woman had an acting job while she took acting classes. RENEW staff worked with employers to develop curricula and learning criteria that were consistent with and complemented the student's classes.

Registered apprenticeships are typically multiyear programs that combine school- and work-based learning experiences in a specific occupational area or cluster that lead to the attainment of highly specialized credentials and licenses, union-paid membership, and entry into highly skilled jobs not open to people without those same credentials. The advantage of young adults entering apprenticeships is the high demand for their skills and the significant earning power of the graduates. The disadvantage of apprenticeship is the long-term commitment (often 4 years) and the stringent classroom- and work-hour requirements.

Naturally Supported Employment

During the past several decades, sheltered employment, subminimum wage jobs, crews, and enclaves have been a major strategy to provide employment for people with significant disabilities. Crews and sheltered employment models are also used by school in an effort to prepare students for employment. During the past two decades, however, individuals with disabilities and their advocates have advocated for full social participation that includes "naturally supported employment" programs and interventions to help individuals with disabilities to obtain *real* jobs

for *real* wages with *regular* employers (Bullis et al., 1993; Hagner, Rogan, & Murphy, 1992). Naturally supported employment incorporates counseling and advisement for the employer so that the employee can be properly supported at work without the stigmatizing presence of a paid support person or "job coach." The RENEW model incorporates a naturally supported employment framework so that youth with EBD will develop a strong connection to and high expectation of employment early in their work lives.

Through the futures planning process, most youth identify employment as a goal or a primary means to accomplish their goals, along with specific job or career objectives. In the context of each career-related goal identified by the youth, the RENEW facilitators work with the young person to identify how the job search will proceed. Some young people have jobs ready and waiting for them through their family network or other connections. Some individuals require job development assistance provided by the facilitator, a school-based vocational specialist. The state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency may be the appropriate source for additional support for project participants. For example, the VR agency paid an employer to train one young man in computer repair. The agency may also pay for transportation, clothes, car repairs, and other items necessary for youth to obtain and maintain employment.

On-the-job mentors are sought out and developed among the employee's coworkers or bosses. These *on-the-job mentors* provide training and support to the young employee and are often asked to link the youth to other employees and watch out for them at work. Working in a real employment setting, participants have many opportunities to receive counseling from mentors and the facilitator about anger management, appropriate social skill building, and mature conflict management.

Losing one's job is considered an opportunity to learn and mature. The RENEW facilitators counsel participants who want to quit their jobs about how to do so appropriately. If a young person is fired from his or her job, the facilitator tries to help the youth analyze what happened and learn how to make the next employment experience a more positive one. The power and value of work becomes an important tool in the development and maturation of RENEW participants, and it takes place in real work settings.

Mentoring: One-on-One Time with Each Youth

Youth with EBD have difficulty developing and maintaining reciprocal, trusting relationships with adults and peers. The value of mentoring for young people at risk has been well documented (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998), and so one of the tasks of the RENEW facilitator is to support the identification, development, and sustainability of mentoring relationships. In the first RENEW project, mentors were matched with participants based on career interests, and a mentoring plan was developed and reviewed with mentors on a regular basis. For example, one 18-year old-participant, who had a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome and had lived his previous 3 years in a group home, had little contact with his family and few adult role models. He was extremely interested in computers and collected "shiny things." The RENEW staff matched this young man with a computer technology support staff member at a technical college who described his own adolescence as "lonely and isolated." The mentor introduced his mentee to a Saturday night "computer geek club." The young RENEW participant attended his mentor's wedding 3 years later and has become an adopted member of the family.

Self-Determination and Personal Responsibility

For various reasons, most of the young people referred for RENEW services do not have access to choices and options open to typically developing youth. School-based meetings with teachers and administrators are often focused on what the student has done wrong and the options and choices that the student has lost as a result of his or her behavior. An important quality of the RENEW process is *how* the facilitator works with each student. There are no behavioral requirements for participation, and the RENEW staff make it clear that services will be provided unconditionally, but that inappropriate, illegal, or harmful behavior will never be condoned.

The RENEW facilitators make significant efforts to relate to youth who are difficult to engage, building trust through their actions as well and their words. It is common to work with youth who have abused drugs or alcohol or who have engaged in risky or illegal behaviors in the community while RENEW services are being offered. RENEW partic-

ipants incur the natural consequences of their actions (such as arrests, loss of driver's license, suspension from work), but the facilitators discuss with them the futility of these destructive behaviors. Additional services with the local mental health center and vocational rehabilitation are often sought to provide further support for the individual youth. Thus, RENEW staff attempt to respond to individual challenges by coordination of services and bringing people to table who are reliable and who offer unconditional help and support that will build on the youth's skills, experiences, needs, and circumstances.

CONCLUSION

In the face of unacceptably low graduation rates and during an era when parity of academic achievement is the priority, the RENEW model was developed and implemented to address the challenges posed by the most disengaged youth. The RENEW approach includes clear goals and outcomes, a strong values base, and proven strategies that allow the staff to work effectively with youth at risk of failure. The RENEW approach uses personal futures planning as an empowerment and organizing tool. Too often we are told that youth with emotional or behavioral disorders are incapable of making wise decisions in their lives. Indeed, their histories in school and the community often reinforce this perception. The RENEW staff, however, have demonstrated that by allowing these youth the opportunity to regain control of their personal futures, they are capable of charting and engaging on educational and career courses that have meaning in their lives. Self-determined and supported educational and vocational plans lead to increased, positive outcomes.

RENEW has been designed in alignment with national initiatives to develop school-to-work transition programs. Thus, career guidance and awareness, academic instruction, degree completion, and a broad range of work-based experiences are the core curriculum for RENEW participants. These curriculum components have been previously validated as strong predictors of competitive employment and productive community engagement (Benz et al., 1997). Mentoring is a key strategy to help the young person learn (or relearn) how to build a trusting, constructive one-on-one relationship with an adult who is willing to be a reliable source of support.

Finally, effective transition for these youth and young adults from school to community must emphasize access to informal and formal relationships and resources. Connecting with resources is consistent with the targets of the National Agenda to Improve Results for Children and Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance (Osher & Hanley, 1996; U. S. Department of Education, 1994) that emphasize the importance of linking schools and agencies to support youth with EBD as they transition into the community (Kutash & Duchnowski, 1997; Smith & Coutinho, 1997). Case management, a role typically played by the mental health services system, is assumed by the RENEW facilitator in cooperation with project participants to implement the futures plan and pull together all of the necessary resources.

RENEW "graduates" often come to visit us. Many of these young people are faced with additional challenges or crises and just need a little guidance. Many come to brag about their accomplishments. True community integration happens when young people go to work at their real jobs for real employers, pay for their cars and rent on their own, take classes at the local college, and develop lasting personal relationships. Those achievements are the hallmarks of a good, typical school-to-adult-life transition model.

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