Moving Beyond Trauma: Activating Resilience to Support Our Most Vulnerable Youth

The adverse impact of exposure to abuse and neglect, poverty, mental illness, substance misuse, harsh school and exclusionary discipline, racism, and punitive social environments on child development has been widely documented (Felitti, & Anda, 2010: Gunnar & Quevedo, 2007; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005/2014). There is a critical need for interventions that support youth who are disengaged and struggling to leverage their individual strengths as well as the assets of the people in their family, school, and community ecosystems. This paper documents the experiences of youth who have emotional and behavioral concerns after they participated in an individualized intervention designed to help them identify their strengths, establish goals, and develop a support network. This intervention, called RENEW (Resilience, Empowerment, and Natural Supports for Education and Work) has been implemented in schools and community mental health clinics for more than 20 years (Bullis & Cheney, 1999; Cheney, Malloy, & Hagner, 1998). RENEW has demonstrated positive impacts on behavioral functioning and educational outcomes (Hagner, Malloy, Mazzone, & Cormier, 2008; Malloy, Bohanon, & Francoeur, 2018; Malloy, Drake, Abate, & Cormier, 2010). This study is a content analysis of youth narratives in response to open-ended questions (Bradford, & Cullen, 2012; Flick, 2009) applying constructs from the literature on resilience (Masten, 2011; Rutter, 2012; Unger, et al, 2008). The purpose of the study is to illuminate how youth describe their prospects and what worked to help them overcome challenges by participating in the RENEW planning process. The discussion ends with a call for further research and how youth who struggle with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges can benefit from humanistic and strengths-based positive development approaches.

Adversity and Inequality

A growing body of empirical research demonstrates that exposure to chronic stress in childhood, including in utero, can adversely impact an individual's neurobiological development and lead to poor physical and mental health (Felitti, & Anda, 2010; Gunnar, & Quevedo, 2007; McEwen, 2007; Oberlander, Weinberg, Papsdorf, Grunau, Misri, & Devlin, 2008). Further, societal, and structural inequalities, such as racism, poverty, neighborhood violence, punitive school environments, and disparities in access to quality healthcare and education can increase the stress of everyday living. The results are disproportionate rates of disease, substance misuse, justice system contacts, learning difficulties, school dropout, and mental illness, particularly among children and youth who live in poverty and who are Black or Hispanic/Latino (Cheng & Jenkins, 2009; Losen, & Gillespie, 2012; Morris, & Perry, 2016; Williams, Sternthal, Wright, 2009).

Over the past several decades, a body of effective individualized cognitive-behavioral and trauma-informed treatments have emerged for children and youth with emotional and behavioral dysfunction (Watkins, Sprang, & Rothbaum, 2018). At the same time, growing bioecological and systems approaches have emerged that address the underlying problems adversely impacting child development, including System of Care initiatives that have been rolled out nationally in the children's mental health and child welfare systems (Stroul, Blau, & Friedman, 2010; Stroul & Friedman,1986;). Family-driven and youth-guided wraparound, the primary intervention to address the needs of children and youth with behavioral health concerns within System of Care projects, is a planning process through the development of youth/family teams who work to support and improve the child or youth functioning in home, school, and community (Bruns, Walker, & The National Wraparound Initiative Advisory Group, 2008). The key elements of wraparound include a focus on strengths, youth and family voice, unconditional care, and the coordination of support across multiple systems and service sectors to achieve the family's vision. The wraparound approach recognizes, and emerging evidence shows, the target for intervention must include the family, the school, and the community if the youth is to achieve ongoing improvement with outcomes (Suter & Bruns, 2009).

Despite increased awareness of how adverse childhood experiences impact child development and the promotion of interventions and initiatives designed to positively impact the ecosystems surrounding vulnerable children and youth, poor outcomes persist, including high rates of school dropout, scholastic underachievement, unemployment, early parenting, substance misuse, mental illnesses, homelessness, and lifelong health concerns (Campbell, Walker, & Egede, 2016: Merrick, Ports, Ford, Afifi, Gershoff, & Grogan-Kaylor, 2017; Poulton, Caspi, Milne, Thomson, Taylor, Sears, & Moffitt, 2002). These outcomes are disproportionately exacted on African American youth, youth who live in poverty, Hispanic youth, and youth with disabilities (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015; Mallett, 2017). There is consensus these disparate outcomes are the result of structural inequalities built into our educational and community systems (Milner, 2012). These structural inequities occur at both macro- and micro-levels, and result in educational practices that convey low expectations and promote the mindsets of the dominant culture. Students in under-resourced schools are victims of the opportunity gap, defined as "the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities," such as lack of access to well-trained and well-supported teachers, overcrowded classrooms, low expectations of students, high-staked testing without adequate accommodations for student diversity, among others (retrieved from: https://www.edglossary.org/). Multi-tiered public health approaches that focus on the needs of the whole child, support teachers to focus on cultural uniqueness and build on each child's strengths, and allocation of resources to address the needs of each school community have yet to have an impact on the outcomes and the prospects of children and youth who grow up in these under-resourced environments (Carter & Welner, Eds., 2013; Hanushek, Peterson, Talpay, & Woessmann, 2019).

Social work practice is steeped in the perspective that health and development is intertwined with an individual's ecology, including their relationships and access to resources in home, school, community and, and society (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Unger, 2002). This ecological model of practice is aligned with trends in public health, education, and children's mental health toward the development of strengths-based, multi-tiered approaches that focus on creating a more supportive and consistent environment, as opposed to focusing on individual change alone.

The Impact of School Policies and Practices

Due to its impact on neurobiological functioning, children and youth who experience chronic stress and adversity, which includes repeated exposure to emotional or physical threats, neglect, or abuse, frequently express their distress in ways that make it difficult for them to form positive relationships. Instead, they are often met with negative responses from the people around them. Research shows a child's primitive instincts for self-preservation and protection are a survival response to chronic stress and adversity. Over time, this may result in impaired brain functioning (De Bellis & Zisk, 2014). The child or youth may develop an inability to regulate their responses to everyday challenges, such as performing a new academic task or responding to new social situations, and their dysregulated response often results in a negative cycle of interactions with others (van der Kolk, 2005).

In schools, students who have been impacted by significant adversity may respond to new situations or everyday challenges by engaging in socially unacceptable and unsafe behaviors. They may not feel emotionally or physically safe or are frustrated because they are unable to communicate their needs in typical ways. In addition, they may feel discouraged because they are constantly receiving negative feedback from others, or they may be seeking to avoid challenging academic tasks or social situations. Teachers often respond by lowering their expectations or sending the student out of class especially when the student's behavior is disruptive (Addison, & Lerman, 2009; Klehm, 2013). School policies may often require automatic suspension for students who engage in disruptive or unsafe behaviors. The problem, however, is that exclusionary discipline practices are not instructive, not effective, and have little relevance to, positive impact upon, or value to the youth who may already be feeling alienated (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014; Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011; Pufall Jones, Margolius, Skubel, Flanagan, & Hynes, 2020).

Scholars in child development, mental health, and education have criticized school practices and policies that seek to improve school safety based on control and exclusionary discipline, noting the harm to child emotional health and development (Gonzalez, 2012; Olson, 2009; Pufall Jones, Margolius, Skubel, Flanagan, & Hynes, 2020; Wehby, Symons, Canale, & Go, 1998). These practices include an over-reliance on harsh consequences including suspension, use of seclusion and restraint, and interpersonal practices focused on controlling student behavior (Olson, 2009). Further, these initiatives have done little to close the achievement gap that exists

between students in poor and wealthy school districts, and between students with disabilities and African American students and their peers (Annamma, Morrison, & Jackson, 2014; Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey, & Woessmann, 2019; Losen, & Gillespie, 2012; Morris & Perry, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2019). Patterns of exclusion and even rejection by their families, schools, communities, and society often lead to greater and greater dysfunction and despair and alienation (Bacher-Hicks, Billings, & Deming, 2019).

School-based models that employ proactive practices with a focus on developing positive relationships, trust, consistency, and safety, tend to have better student outcomes, even when controlling for student and community factors such as poverty, race and ethnicity, or disability (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron, & Osher, 2020; Osher, Kidron, DeCandia, Kendziora, & Weissberg, 2016; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Wang & Degol, 2016). Positive Youth Development (PYD) approaches, including those implemented in schools, also focus on strengths and building competencies related to improving behaviors among youth such as: competence, confidence, connection, care and compassion, and character (Bowers, Li, Kiely, Brittian, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). School environments that integrate social/emotional development strategies with academic instruction led to improved academic outcomes and a more positive school climate (Skiba, & Peterson, 2000). The school environment can be an important intervention target for building resilience among students who face significant individual and ecological challenges. As Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barronb, and Osher (2020) state:

> "…children's development and learning are shaped by interactions among the environmental factors, relationships, and learning opportunities they experience, both in and out of school, along with physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional processes that influence one another—both biologically and functionally—as they enable or undermine learning" (pp. 98).

Resilience

Beginning in the 1970s, developmental psychologists observed certain children fared better than others when faced with significant stress and adversity, labeling this phenomenon as resilience (Garmezy, 1973; Masten 1989). While there are numerous definitions and models, the concept of resilience represents "a paradigm shift from the identification of the risk factors (i.e., a pathological view) to the identification of strengths of individuals and families. A 'resilient' individual is stress-resistant and less vulnerable despite experiences of significant adversity" (Lee, Cheung, & Kwong, 2012, p. 2). Research on resilience has identified specific characteristics or traits of resilient individuals, which Masten and Reed (2002) describe as assets, resources, protective factors, and related processes. Specifically, research finds resilient children and youth possess both internal and external assets, including optimism, perceptions of control, self- efficacy, and active coping skills as well as and support from the within their ecosystems, including positive emotional

attachment to caring adults and supportive environments that build social, emotional, and behavioral competence (Hepworth, Rooney, & Larsen, 2002; Lee, Cheung, & Kwong, 2012; Smith, 2002; Unger, et al., 2012).

Resilience research has been criticized for focusing on individual agency and ignoring the institutionalized and structural inequalities that disproportionately impact certain groups, including people who live in poverty, individuals exposed to adverse childhood experiences, individuals with mental illness, and racial and ethnic minorities (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda, 2014; van Breda, 2018). This has led to an expanded theory that focuses on resilience as a function of the individual's "social ecology," emphasizing strategies that build the capacity of the individual as well as that of the family, community, school, societal and cultural resources to support the youth. Further, Unger, et al. (2012) suggests researchers use an emic approach to studies of resilience, in other words, understanding resilience from the individual or cultural group's perspective, thereby avoiding the projection of standards of resilience by the dominant culture onto all individuals.

The social ecological perspective is consistent with the emergence of interdisciplinary, multi-level, trauma-informed frameworks focused on sustaining, repairing, and developing strong relationships and social supports around vulnerable children and youth. These approaches target change at both the individual and the ecological levels, including family, school, and community with the aim to improve development, build resilience, and support recovery (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron & Osher, 2020; Luthar, Crossman, & Small, 2015; Masten, 2011; Quiros & Berger, 2015; Shonkoff, et al., 2012; Unger, 2012; Winslow, Sandler, Wolchik, & Carr, 2013;). Specific frameworks, such as Positive Youth Development and Systems of Care, promote proactive youth- and family-driven support and interventions at multiple levels in the youth's ecosystem (Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009; Stroul, Blau, & Friedman, 2010). These multi-level interventions recognize social support and relationships that surround children and youth are critical to their healthy development. Additionally, dropout prevention, juvenile justice, and positive youth development research shows youth who struggle with emotional or behavioral issues have improved education and social competence when there is at least one caring adult in their lives (Center for Promise, 2013; Erdem, DuBois, Larose, De Wit, & Lipman, 2016; Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009; Pufall Jones, Margolius, Skubel, Flanagan, & Hynes, 2020).

Given the need for greater understanding of how to build support within and around youth with significant risk factors such as those with social, emotional, and behavioral health concerns, this study seeks to surface the perspectives of youth based on the Masten's (2011) research framework for resilience after they participated in a youth-driven, strengths-based person-centered planning process focused on their transition from high school to post high school life.

Indicators of Resilience

Self-efficacy is a critical component among resilient individuals and is defined as a person's belief that they can successfully complete a certain task or

achieve a particular outcome, including a sense of control an individual has over their choices and behaviors (Bandura, 1982). Coping strategies that are associated with self-efficacy include an understanding of what one can control, managing goals, managing time, logging accomplishments, linking shorter term tasks to longer term goal attainment, drawing on strengths and past accomplishments, and emotional regulation (Delany, Miller, El-Ansary, Remedios, Hosseini, & McLeod, 2015). Optimism is another quality among resilient individuals and is related to self-efficacy, characterized as "a positive attitude to life events and situations" (McBride, 2012, p. 6). Optimism and self-efficacy are crucial elements of individual resilience and drive individual motivation to overcome challenging or difficult situations (Schwarzer &Warner, 2013). Individuals who lack self- efficacy will often give up or say "I don't care" when in fact they do not believe they have the power or control to change their situation. Conversely, individuals who have specific strategies to address challenging situations are better equipped to and feel they can overcome adversity. Resilience is, in part, a function of individual temperament, but emerging resilience and positive youth development research show optimism and self-efficacy can be developed by offering opportunities to positive experiences, supportive relationships, and access to resources.

Approaches that focus on building resilience are also strengths-based. Behavioral and social service practices, including social work, have been evolving toward wellness-orientated, strengths-based approaches and de-emphasizing deficit-based treatment models (Center for Promise, 2013; Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009; Saleebey, 1996; van Breda, 2018). Southwick. Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda (2014) describe this forward-looking approach from the social work perspective:

> "Rather than spending most of their time and energy examining the negative consequences of trauma, clinicians and researchers can learn to simultaneously evaluate and teach methods to enhance resilience. Such an approach moves the field away from a purely deficit-based model of mental health, toward the inclusion of strength and competence- based models that focus on prevention and building strengths in addition to addressing psychopathology" (p.2).

Individualized, strengths-based interventions that are provided as part of a continuum of support can be an effective tool for engaging and establishing positive relationships with children and youth with emotional and behavioral health concerns. Further, there is emerging evidence that strengths-based approaches can result in greater self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and eventually lead to better outcomes among at-risk youth (Jenson, Alter, Nicotera, Anthony, & Forrest-Bank, 2013; Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006).

RENEW: A Resilience-Building Model

Resilience, Empowerment, and Natural supports for Education and Work (RENEW) was developed in 1996 by a team of researchers at the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire and Keene State College as part of a grant-funded project to support youth with emotional and behavioral concerns through the transition from adolescence to adulthood. RENEW focuses on developing resilience and represents a positive youth development approach for the most disengaged students who are the greatest risk of scholastic failure, incarceration, chronic unemployment, homeless, substance misuse, mental illness, chronic health issues, and social isolation. In addition, RENEW is structured to ensure the planning process is youth-driven and tailored to the individual to build the youth's planning and problem-solving skills as they address their own personal and real-world challenges. Finally, the process builds protective factors around each youth through the planning process and by connecting or reconnecting the youth with critical family, school, community, and system resources. One crucial goal of RENEW is to teach the youth new skills, but it is also intended to impact the youth's self-view toward a more positive and hopeful perspective.

The RENEW intervention is situated in the positive youth development and wraparound traditions, as it focuses on proactive, strengths-based strategies designed to empower the youth and activate resources in their social and community networks. RENEW has three primary elements: (1) personal futures planning using graphic facilitation; (2) access to natural and formal supports through individualized team development and facilitation, and; (3) a focus on career development. Graphic facilitation is the process of using visuals and symbols to interpret conversations into visual form, typically using flip chart paper, with the aim of helping people develop new knowledge and integrate concepts (Sibbit, 2008). RENEW facilitators are trained to use a particular form of graphic facilitation developed to support people with intellectual disabilities (Cotton, 2003; Mount, 1992; Pearpoint, O'Brien, & Forest, 1992). The facilitator moves the youth through a structured protocol of nine topics and captures their narratives on flip chart paper called "maps" using graphic facilitation (see Figure 1 for an example of a "map"). The nine topics are, in order: (1) your story or history; (2) your situation today; (3) your strengths and accomplishments; (4) your people and resources; (5) your preferences: what works and what doesn't work; (6) your dreams; (7) your concerns; (8) your goals, and, (9) next steps.

Figure 1

*Example of a Youth's History "Map"*
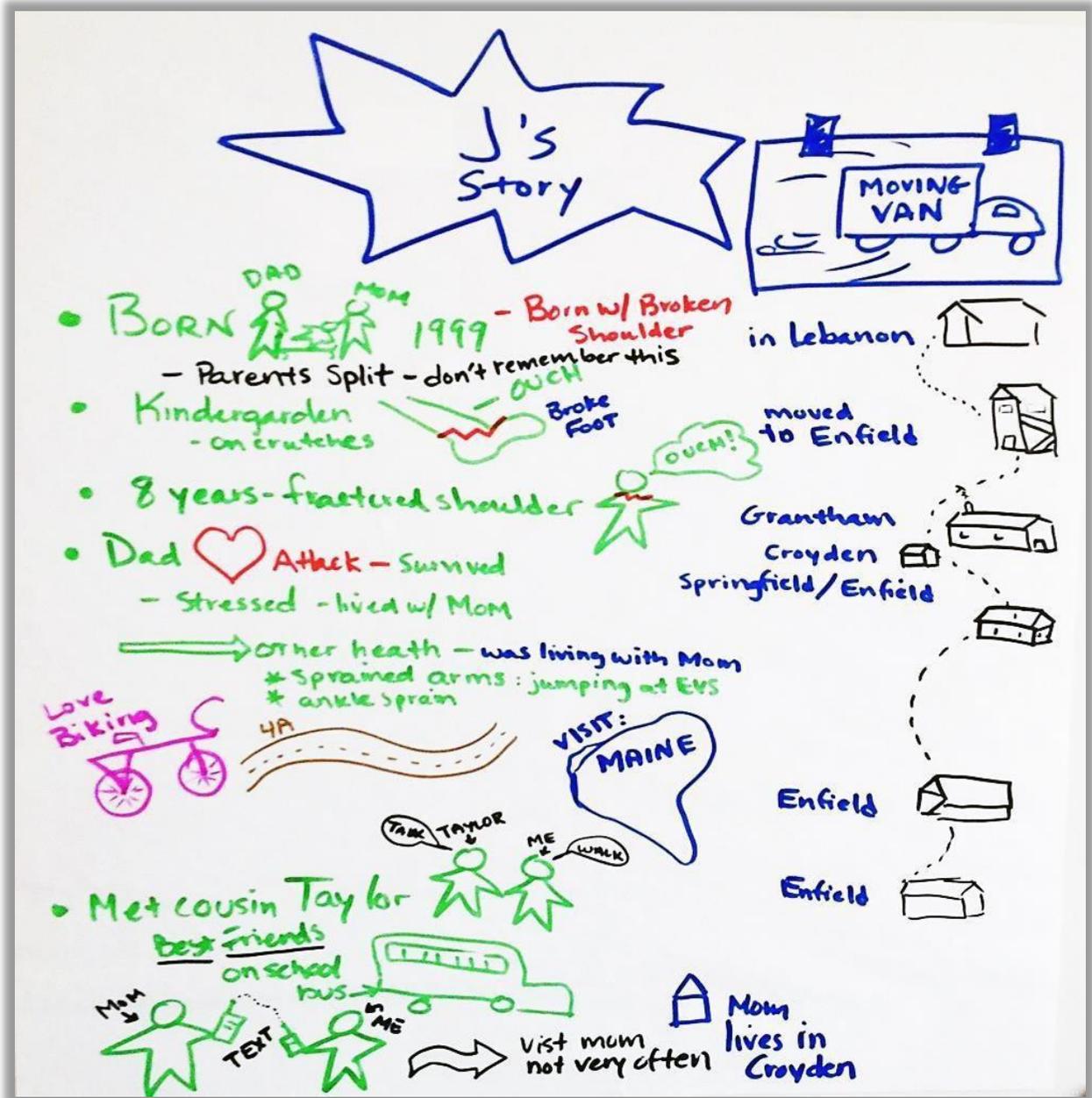
The "maps" become the basis for the youth and facilitator to develop a plan and identify what is needed for resources, typically people, to achieve their goals (Malloy, Drake, Francoeur, Cloutier, Couture, & O'Rourke, 2014). Based on family- and youth-driven wraparound planning, each youth forms a uniquely constructed team that brings people and resources together to support them (Suter & Bruns,

2009). Knowing youth who have emotional, behavioral, and social challenges are often disengaged from the people and supports that could help them succeed, each youth's RENEW team is individually designed and facilitated with the goal of connecting the youth to concrete and emotional supports that will help them achieve their goals. The plan becomes the basis for developing the team, which is the second stage of the process. Each youth decides who will be on their team and how individuals will be asked to participate. In addition, RENEW Facilitators work with their youth to develop team meeting ground rules, meeting agendas, and the youth typically leads the meetings. Facilitators check-in frequently with the youth and with team members to assess progress and problem-solve. Facilitators use a planning template and create measurable objectives that are reviewed during team meetings and check-in meetings with the youth.

These RENEW strategies are specifically designed to help each youth develop concrete, personally relevant plan, connect to social and formal supports, and engage them more frequently in working with the facilitator and eventually with members of their team (see Figure 2). The RENEW activities are intended to result in improved emotional and behavioral functioning, youth self-efficacy, more positive relationships, enhanced access to resources, and improved career outcomes.

Figure 2

RENEW Theory of Change
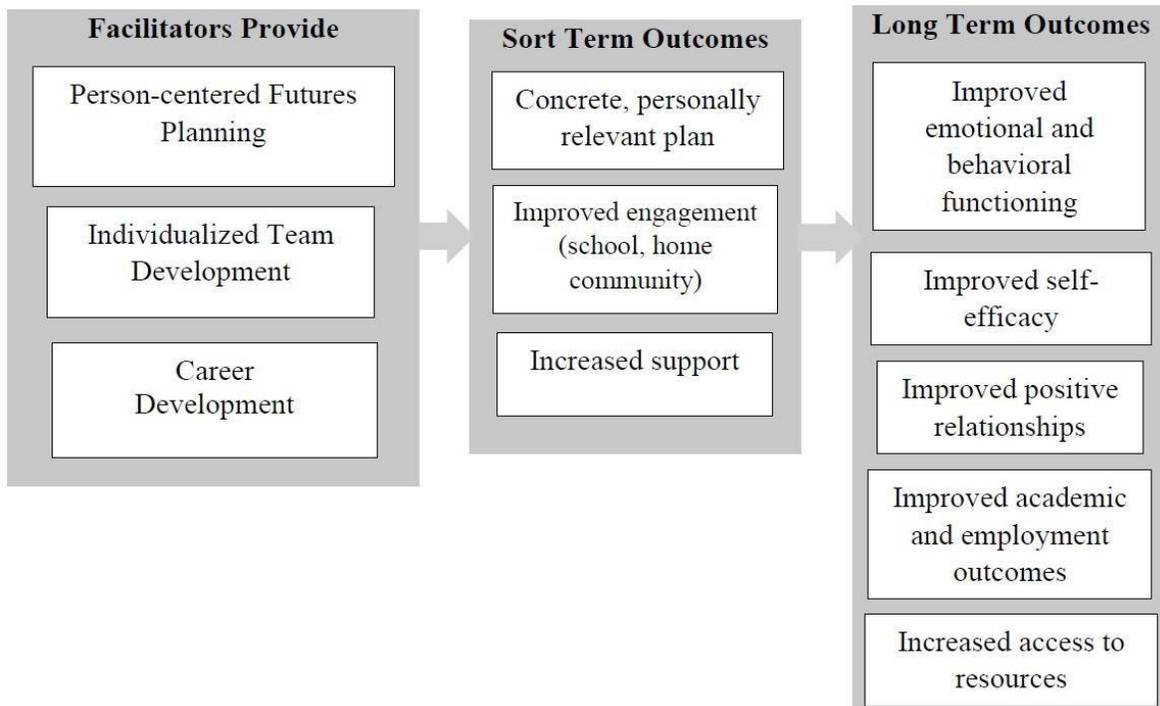
Research has shown the application of RENEW process produces positive results over multiple cohorts. As a stand-alone intervention, the first demonstration project showed promising outcomes for very difficult-to-engage youth with emotional and behavioral disorders (Bullis, & Cheney, 1999; Cheney, Hagner, Malloy, Cormier, Bernstein,1998; Cheney, Malloy, & Hagner, 1998; Hagner, Cheney, & Malloy, 1999). A subsequent project demonstrated RENEW is an appropriate community re-entry strategy for youth who were placed in juvenile justice system facilities, showing improved self-efficacy and engagement in school and work (Hagner, Malloy, Mazzone, & Cormier, 2008). Another study of the behavioral functioning of 20 students who received RENEW in two of the schools showed improvement in overall behavioral health, with significant improvements in the domains of school and work, self-harm, and moods and emotions (Malloy, Sundar, Hagner, Pierias, & Viet, 2010). An ethnographic study of four youth who participated in the RENEW process in one PBIS high school showed improved engagement in school, greater attachment to teachers and other adults, an increased sense of accomplishment, and an understanding of how the planning and problem-solving process produces positive results (Malloy, 2011). These promising outcomes from New Hampshire have resulted in support for a clinical trial to be concluded in 2020 (Suter & Malloy, 2015) and replication of RENEW through educational networks in other states, including Illinois, Pennsylvania, California, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Maryland.

Method

This is a qualitative phenomenological study, first described by Moustakas (1994) as an analytic process that results in a description of "the meaning of the **lived experiences** for several individuals about a concept or the **phenomenon"** (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). The phenomenon under investigation in this study is the perspectives of youth that indicate resilience within the context of receiving personal centered planning and team facilitation through the RENEW intervention. The authors used a deductive data analysis protocol, working from more specific to broader categories, which is appropriate for this situation given resilience is a developed concept (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The research questions were:

1. What indicators of resilience are expressed by youth as they reflect on receiving the RENEW intervention??
2. How did the youth characterize the supportiveness of their family, school, and community?

Setting

The focus groups were conducted in four high schools that were participating in an Institute of Educational Sciences-funded efficacy study conducted in 12 high schools in Maryland, Illinois, Vermont, and New Hampshire between 2015-2020

(Suter & Malloy, 2015). RENEW was implemented as a Tier 3 intervention in each school within the multi-tiered Schoolwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) framework. Youth were eligible for the efficacy study if they: (a) were in 9th or 10th grade; (b) were at risk of dropout because of academic failures and/or being disengaged from school; and (c) had an emotional or behavioral concern that had not responded to universal (Tier 1) or targeted (Tier 2) supports. Half of the students were randomized into the RENEW intervention (n=122) and half to the comparison group (n=123). Only youth in the RENEW intervention group participated in the focus groups.

The focus group schools were chosen based on their distinct demographic differences (the two Maryland schools have majority non-White students, while the students in the two New Hampshire schools are overwhelmingly White), strong implementation of the RENEW model (the students receive the intervention for a sufficient amount of time and dosage), and school support for conducting the focus groups.

The youth were interviewed in small groups of two or three in their schools. The interviews were designed to gauge their perspectives about the impact of the RENEW intervention. The focus groups were facilitated by one of the authors and the study research assistant using semi structured, open-ended questions such as: 1) Over the past year and a half, how much progress have you made in your life toward your goals?; 2) What have school people done that you found helpful?; 3) What things happened or what did school people do that you found not helpful?; 4) How much control of the decisions and choices you were making did you feel you had?; 5) To what extent do you feel you've been able to overcome or address challenges over the past year?; 6) What are some important relationships have you built over the past year? Each individual or group session lasted approximately 1 hour. The semi-structured interview questionnaire used with students is in Appendix C.

Analysis

The focus groups were audio recorded and the recording was transcribed by a program research assistant. The lead author of the study and the school's RENEW facilitator were present during each focus group. The authors reviewed the transcripts separately and highlighted youth statements that reflected specific categories of resilience as outlined by Masten (2011), including and a supportive environment, optimism, perceptions of control, self-efficacy, active coping, positive emotional attachment to caring adults, social, emotional, and behavioral competence, and a sense of self-efficacy. The authors then used an iterative process to discuss their rationales for attributing chosen statements to specific categories, coming to agreement on their list of statements and codes. The authors repeated the process four times, individually coding the statements, discussing their results, developing consensus on their categorizations, and finalizing the results (Braun & Clarke 2006; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The authors then assessed the commonalities of the resilience statements across all youth by conducting an analysis of the presence or absence of the resiliency categories using the "rainbow" method (Cabrera-Mieles, 2019). The

rainbow sheet process consisted of two spreadsheets: youth responses to the interview questions and resiliency determinants present based on each statement by youth per high school. Each high school was assigned a color and label. Every participant statement related to one of the resiliency categories was documented by category within the spreadsheet. The cells from this spreadsheet were then converted to shaded cells in the second spreadsheet (See Figure 3). Once completed, the rainbow sheet provided an efficient way to scan and identify if and where the resiliency themes were evident by school. The rainbow analysis was not applied as a standalone method but used along with the iterative coding process to help confirm or contradict findings.

Figure 3
Rainbow Visual Analysis of Youth Statements Across High School Sites

Themes	Categories	HS 1	HS 2	HS 3	HS4
1. Caring relationships, supportive environments	A supportive environment				
2. Framing positive goals: positive development and achievements in expected developmental tasks.	optimism drawing on strengths and past accomplishments Self-efficacy, mastery				
3. Goal attainment/managing goals, managing time, logging accomplishments, linking shorter term tasks to longer term goal attainment--	Locus of control Self-efficacy				
4. Human adaptive systems attachment relationships, change in attachment relationships, self-efficacy, emotional or behavioral self-regulation, and problem-solving ability	active coping emotional regulation social, emotional and behavioral competence				

*HS= High School

**Shaded areas indicate presence of statements consistent with the categories

Study Participants

Youth were recruited for semi-structured interviews after they had been receiving RENEW for 6-18 months as part of their participation in the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) study. The youth provided written assent, and consent was obtained from their parent/legal guardian, as required by the University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board. Their interviews were conducted in small groups. Each focus group participant was paid $50 for their interview. Participation was voluntary.

Table 1
Characteristics of Youth Participants

Youth	High School	State	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Date of Interview
1	1	MD	F	African American	November 2018
2	1	MD	M	African American	November 2018
3	2	MD	M	African American	November 2018
4	2	MD	M	African American	November 2018
5	2	MD	M	African American	November 2018
6	3	NH	F	White	April 2018
7	3	NH	M	White	April 2018
8	4	NH	M	White	November 2018
9	4	NH	F	White	November 2018

Table 1 depicts the demographic characteristic of the students who participated in the interviews. All four study participants from New Hampshire were White, reflecting the overwhelmingly White student population (94%) and all five students from the Maryland schools were African American. The African American student population in the two participating high schools in Maryland was 59% (school # 3) and 63% (school # 4) in 2018. Every student experienced the RENEW process of mapping their future's plan and holding team meetings at the time of their interviews.

Results

The iterative coding and rainbow analysis of the youth's statements fell into four major themes of resilience: supportive environments, framing positive goals, managing goals and progress toward achievement, and individual adaptive capability (Masten, 2011). The first theme reflected the importance of supportive relationships, including emotional and concrete support from their teachers, the RENEW facilitators, and family members. The second theme identified across the

youth reflected positively framed goals and progress toward achieving their goals. This theme was reflected in expressions of optimism and positive accomplishments. The third theme identified throughout the transcripts was a greater sense of efficacy, including managing progress towards goals, managing time, and linking shorter term accomplishments to longer term achievement. The final theme found reflected greater emotional and behavioral self-regulation and behavioral competence, perspectives of the self that Masten identifies as "human adaptive systems" (2011, p. 502). What follows is an in-depth description of the results within each theme.

Table 2:
Indicators, Themes, and Specific Youth Quotes Indicating Resilience

Category	Theme	Youth Statements
Caring and supportive relationships	A Supportive environment	"We occasionally go out to coffee when we can and just figure things out…But we don't have to have these weekly meetings anymore because he trusts in my ability to take care of myself and be my own advocate.'
		"a lot of the times the RENEW people would help me find help and …, I have a hard time with that. For whatever reason I hate accepting help, I hate people helping me."
		"It definitely helped being able to talk to somebody about what I want to do and what I feel like I can do versus what I can't. There's always these people that say ok you can't"
		"…and she wanted to be a weekly participant in the meetings to see how successful I was being and it just helped form a much stronger bond with my mother then I had beforehand"
		"She pulled me out of class, check on my grades like every other week, see if I was on track, she emailed my teachers if I had a low grade to see what was going on and see if I can get make-up work."
		".. well I can't say I've been on their side the whole time, but what's been helpful is that they've kind of bared with me and just kept trying and trying and trying and I've actually been picking up on it."
		"you guys have resources to make most of our goals work. They have people like the daycares all of that and that's what I want to do after high school and she knows a lot of people."

		"and they kind of told me, put me on the better path to go than where I was headed, because I was probably not gonna finish high school."
		"I told her I wanted to go to barber school after high school, so she looked up barber school around [the state] and stuff like that."
		"Not that they [school staff] didn't care. I know that it's kind of their job to care because they have to care for children, but it just showed me that it is deeper than that, like they really actually cared about us like helping us get to where we needed to be and everything."
		"I just felt that they really cared."
		"Every teacher got on my personal level. And it got to a real comfortable to a point where I could just tell them anything that was on my mind. And it made it easier with the flip chart things."
Optimism	Framing positive goals; positive development and achievements in expected developmental tasks	"My dreams are that I want to finish high school and I want to go to college."
		"whenever I had a bad situation or something he'd tell me to keep my head up. And that's what I do, And eventually you gonna' make it."
		"I've made some progress. I feel like I can make more once I graduate."
		"I have overcome some of my self-doubts and I've started doing things that a year ago I wouldn't even try."
		"They was like you're so different now and you're doing so good. I'm so proud of you. And that made me feel good too."
		"It's been goin' real good for me."
		"Going to college. Everything is going good now, thanks to the group."
		": Arnold Schwarzenegger. He was actually a bodybuilder and then he was an actor and then he was like governor like California or something and his whole life motto is speech is kind of like it doesn't matter who says, what if someone says it can't be done, show em' up."
Drawing on strengths and		"and this map kind of assisted in showing me that I had the tools to change and that I was slowly getting accomplishment after accomplishment so it

past accomplishments		motivated me to want to push further in my achievements."
		"I started understanding that I have a reason to be confident. I have accomplishments under my belt that are a lot harder than some people have to deal with."
		"I wanted to start getting good grades. I wanted to manage my time better and start focusing on what I needed to instead of wasting as much time as I did worrying about all these other things because I saw what was important."
Self-efficacy and mastery	Managing goals, managing time, logging accomplishments; Linking short term tasks to longer term goal accomplishment	"I have motivation now." "I don't have any F's. That's surprising." "Well, When I started RENEW, I didn't have my license and I've got my license since then. I've gotten like, go up to teachers and asked for helped and not been afraid to do it." ": I mean I just kept trying my hardest and keep doin' and keep working til' I get it." "I mean, the thing I found helpful was drawing out the map really. I can't string it together in my head so it's nice to have it down on a piece of paper." "I have been able to overcome and address challenges before. Umm, I had a big motivation problem. I didn't believe in myself, and while that is still going, it's not as heavy as it was before. I have overcome some of my self-doubts and I've started doing things that a year ago I wouldn't even try." "I umm kind of like what she said.. the maps… when it was all drawn out I could look at it and using what I said before I could string it all together into one drawn out plan." "So, Mitchie and I had, we had a goal to save $200.00 during the summer and I saved $350.00." "So instead of trying to scramble around with all that in my head, I had it all written down on a piece of paper that we set up at the meetings. It's like, "OK, so what did I need to get done this

		week?" And just was very effective in giving me the structure I needed."
		"Three years ago I used to get like bad grades. I didn't really show up to school like that. Like a whole bunch of absences and now like I'm getting good grades and I'm showing up to school like every day. Stuff like that."
Locus of control Perceptions of control		" What was helpful about me having the control of decision was I umm ... the maps… when it was all drawn out I could look at it and using what I said before I could string it all together into one drawn out plan. And that's how it's been since kind of day one."
		"{I} still kind of make little action plans for myself based on like the whole RENEW model of setting like when does this need to be done."
		"You get to choose what goes on them and you get to. I got to draw the pictures and everything and we'd make it fun and colorful."
		"RENEW helped me to get flawless attendance because I started focusing more on getting into class and achieving my goals because I knew to climb out of the My Life Today and get to My Dreams, I had to start attending school and getting better grades. And on top of that, I needed to get myself a job and start saving money and providing funds to help buy groceries at home and just get more food in the house and assist with helping with all that."
		"All of the maps, and everything. And going over things, changing things as we go along. Keeping up with progress and making dates and setting goals for everything. Trying to get stuff done."
		"for most part I would kind of go with what they said, but where it mattered I had the freedom of choice. I would start with some basic idea in mind off of the topic in the discussion and I would work on it from there until I had a well thought out plan. Umm, although everything else was just going along with what they said, I did get the majority of choices."
Active coping	Individual adaptive systems:	"I just focus on my work because it relaxes me …sometimes it's a lot to relate to other people"

	attachment, self-regulation, problem-solving ability.	"I can actually have more of a student/teacher relationship like talk about my issues get my work done." "I got to get close to a teacher that I had. I tell them about my problems, we make solutions just like that so, I rather be more close with adults in the school." "I could be like hey [that's what I wanted to do build real relationships not just end it when I don't have high school anymore." "as I got more involved in the RENEW process and started focusing more on my success instead of trying to be disruptive or walk out of class or not care or be mouthy. And it just became easier for me to go through school because I wasn't getting in trouble as often"
Emotional regulation		" I used to fight a lot and all that and had a lot of issues here and there so she just helped me calm down and all that and get a little music goin'. All the time I was trying to calm myself down, trying to walk away, sometimes." "So, I just used to have some really bad anger issues and I've gotten to the point now, because Ms. …, I can control it and go for walks and just chill out. And like, my depression. I used to be, I used to cut like, I used to have, like, suicidal depression. And she and she, like, figured it out and helped like instead of doing that to do something else." "I started doing good there [new school] and I got in the right group and yeah, I just have to fall back from some people to get to where I need to be." "So, I just used to have some really bad anger issues and I've gotten to the point now, because Ms. XX, I can control it and go for walks and just chill out. And like, my depression. I used to be, I used to cut like, I used to have, like, suicidal depression. And she and she, like, figured it out and helped like instead of doing that to do something else." " I don't really get in any trouble with the administrators anymore. I don't skip my classes anymore."

		"Like my ninth-grade year, I was always in ISI (in school suspension). Everyday. And now I'm a senior, I don't want to be in ISI like that, only been to ISI one time this year."
Social, emotional and behavioral competence		"I kind of have two RENEW facilitators here…. They're both absolutely awesome. They're both always on me, but I need it so I can be where I need to be. Because then when I'm there no one bugs me because I'm already getting my stuff done, so they don't need to." "I've gotten like, go up to teachers and asked for help and not been afraid to do it." "I had, I have a social disability where I am still a little afraid to talk to people and I get a stress stutter when I'm nervous- you can kind of hear it right now. Anyway, I did kind of get over it and I've learned how to kind of hold that back for a while, so I have made a few more friends outside of school, inside of school. Just overall, expanded my loop." "Yeah. I feel like after high school I can still stay in contact with them if they're the ones who helped me get a job at the hospital or something. "If I didn't go through RENEW, it would definitely be different. I would still be a silent, nervous person, who… I don't wanna say a wreck, but pretty close. I just wouldn't engage and I wouldn't be. I wouldn't do as many things as I do now, cuz I just wouldn't believe in myself to do them." "I'm very insecure so self-confidence has been something that I've been trying to work on. That's a big thing that holds me back a lot, is I'm always very scared to take that next step and that's something that I've been trying to work on that RENEW has helped me a lot with because I wasn't even gonna come here today." "I don't really get in any trouble with the administrators anymore. I don't skip my classes anymore."

A Supportive Environment

When asked what was most helpful about the RENEW intervention, every youth talked about the attention, support, and encouragement they received from their RENEW facilitator, teachers, counselors and, in several instances, their school administrators. Using terms like, "they kept at me," they would "see if I was on track," I just felt that they really cared," and "they put me on a better path." Clearly individualized attention was meaningful to the youth, and they responded by doing better in school and seeking help when they would not do so before. The youth talked about how the planning process and close monitoring of their progress in school helped them stay or get back on track academically. Others talked about how they deeply valued the time and unconditional, caring relationships they established through the RENEW intervention, reflected in statements such as, "It definitely helped being able to talk to somebody about what I want to do and what I feel like I can do versus what I can't. There are always these people that say ok you can't."

In additional to the emotional support they received, the youth provided specific examples of the instrumental or concrete help they received through the RENEW process, with statements about how their facilitators and team members linked them to specific job opportunities or helped them connect to post high school resources. This was mentioned more often among the African American students, perhaps reflecting their focus on their income and meeting basic needs.

One youth offered a particularly nuanced view of what real caring and help looked like to him, reflecting an understanding that teachers are busy and that it is difficult to individualize supports for students:

> "Not that they [school staff] didn't care. I know that it's kind of their job to care because they have to care for children, but it just showed me that it is deeper than that, like they really actually cared about us like helping us get to where we needed to be and everything."

Framing Positive Goals: Positive Development and Achievements

There are two categories that reflect the theme of optimism and drawing on strengths and past accomplishments. The youth talked about the challenges they have faced (parents who were incarcerated, misusing substances, among others) and how their adversities led to feeling alienated from other students and adults. The ability to remain forward looking, positive about one's future, and to establish positive goals is an important skill for overcoming adversity. The statements of youth in the study indicated they experienced a positive shift in their perspective and self-perception through the RENEW process, particularly with respect to goal setting through the graphic facilitation or mapping process. For example, one youth stated, "I have overcome some of my self-doubts, and I've started doing things that a year ago I wouldn't even try." Another youth stated the encouragement from their RENEW facilitator and team members was helpful to keeping a positive frame of mind, "They was like you're so different now and you're doing so good. I'm so proud of you. And that made me feel good too."

The planning tools, particularly the graphic display of the youth's goals and objectives, was mentioned by several youth as impactful and helpful to shifting their perspective. These youth described how they could not see a path to graduation and their other career goals until they worked with the facilitator to develop a specific plan. As one youth stated, "and this map kind of assisted in showing me that I had the tools to change and that I was slowly getting accomplishment after accomplishment, so it motivated me to want to push further in my achievements." One key word in this statement is motivation, which is a key characteristic of resilient individuals. The youth described how they were feeling discouraged by their lack of success in school, and how the strengths-based process turned around their view to be more optimistic about their prospects. Masten (2011) and other resilience scholars have found people who have a purpose, a belief that can succeed, and a clearly outlined plan are more successful in overcoming challenging situations than those who do not. The youth talked about how they were motivated to focus on moving forward: "I wanted to start getting good grades. I wanted to manage my time better and start focusing on what I needed to instead of wasting as much time as I did worrying about all these other things because I saw what was important."

Additionally, several youth mentioned the process of reflecting on their strengths and accomplishments as part of the RENEW futures planning process helped them to discover their capabilities to achieve their goals. This is reflected in statements such as "and this map kind of assisted in showing me that I had the tools to change," and "I started understanding that I have a reason to be confident. I have accomplishments under my belt that are a lot harder than some people have to deal with." Positive feedback and facilitated reflection helped each youth to understand they have the tools to be successful, but it is evident these self-perceptions needed to be surfaced in an intentional way.

Self-Efficacy, Managing Goals, and Incremental Progress

There are two categories under this theme: Self-efficacy/mastery and locus of control. Self-efficacy emerged as a consistent and important category. Each youth indicated they began to feel more confident, motivated, and able to achieve their goals once they began to participate in the RENEW process. They attributed this greater sense of confidence to the accomplishment of concrete tasks, the planning structure and tools provided by the process, and the safety net provided by support from their team members. This growing confidence is reflected in statements such as, "I have overcome some of my self-doubts and I've started doing things that a year ago I wouldn't even try" and "Three years ago I used to get like bad grades. I didn't really show up to school like that. Like a whole bunch of absences and now like I'm getting good grades and I'm showing up to school like every day. Stuff like that." The ability to ask for help was also mentioned by youth as an important aspect of improved confidence: "Well, When I started RENEW, I didn't have my license and I've got my license since then. I've gotten like, go up to teachers and asked for helped and not been afraid to do it."

The youth attributed their improved self-efficacy to the structure provided by the RENEW planning process. Several youth mentioned the mapping process, the

graphic facilitation, creating a step- by-step plan, and the progress monitoring provided by the facilitator were helpful and contributed to their forward progress at school. This is indicated in statements such as "All of the maps, and everything. And going over things, changing things as we go along. Keeping up with progress and making dates and setting goals for everything. Trying to get stuff done," "{I} still kind of make little action plans for myself based on like the whole RENEW model of setting like when does this need to be done." One statement summarizes the importance of the planning process:

> "So instead of trying to scramble around with all that in my head, I had it all written down on a piece of paper that we set up at the meetings. It's like, "OK, so what did I need to get done this week?" And just was very effective in giving me the structure I needed."

Having a sense of control is the second category in this theme of mastery over one's situation. Many of the youth described how they did not feel empowered, especially at school, until they went through the RENEW process. Again, the graphic facilitation process was mentioned by youth as impactful and fostered feelings of control. One student stated, "You get to choose what goes on them. I got to draw the pictures and everything and we'd make it fun and colorful." Further, the youth stated how they felt they were being heard, and perceived the process as a partnership where their ideas were being taken seriously: "All of the maps, and everything. And going over things, changing things as we go along. Keeping up with progress and making dates and setting goals for everything. Trying to get stuff done."

Individual Adaptive Systems: Attachment, Self-regulation, Problem-solving

The fourth and final theme from Masten's framework identifies the importance of emotional self-control to overcoming challenging situations. It is important to note there are significant cultural differences and norms regarding how individuals express their emotions in their families and communities. That said, the perspectives of the individual youth and the pride they expressed in being able to function well emotionally and socially are instructive here. The youth talked about how they were better able to cope, reflected in comments such as, "as I got more involved in the RENEW process and started focusing more on my success instead of trying to be disruptive or walk out of class or not care or be mouthy. And it just became easier for me to go through school because I wasn't getting in trouble as often." Many of the youth attributed their improved emotional regulation to their positive attachment to teachers and their RENEW facilitators. One particularly powerful statement reflects how a youth gained control of feelings of anger and alienation:

> "So, I just used to have some really bad anger issues and I've gotten to the point now, because of Ms. [RENEW facilitator] …, I can control it and go for walks and just chill out. And like, my depression. I used to be, I used to cut like, I used to have, like, suicidal depression. And she and she, like,

figured it out and helped like instead of doing that to do something else."

Similarly, youth addressed the importance of attachment, and they made the connection between the development of positive, supportive relationships with adults and achieving emotional and behavioral competence. Statements such as, "I kind of have two RENEW facilitators here…. They're both absolutely awesome. They're both always on me, but I need it so I can be where I need to be…" The youth understand they will be accepted and achieve their goals because they are being supported and accepted as they are, despite their personal challenges. Another powerful statement confirms the relationship between positive relationships and self-regulation:

> "I had, I have a social disability where I am still a little afraid to talk to people and I get a stress stutter when I'm nervous- you can kind of hear it right now. Anyway, I did kind of get over it and I've learned how to kind of hold that back for a while, so I have made a few more friends outside of school, inside of school. Just overall, expanded my loop."

The connection was made between consistent check ins, mentoring, and partnering with adults to their ability to make positive gains toward their goals, consistent with the notion that attachment to at least one adult is a critical element to building youth resilience.

Discussion

The analysis of the transcripts shows that the targets outlined in the RENEW Theory of Change (Figure 2) were reached. Through the graphic planning process, every youth in this study described histories of childhood adversity and lack of positive relationships, indicating that every youth was experiencing the adverse impacts of trauma. Youth were referred to RENEW because they were disengaged from and functioning poorly in school. Despite their differences and challenges, the youth were consistent in identifying two aspects of the RENEW intervention that stood out as most important to them- development of a plan that uses graphic facilitation, and a supportive eco-system that included positive connections with people who persisted, provided guidance to, and shared instrumental supports with the youth. In the context of the resilience framework, the students described improvements in their self- efficacy, greater control, ability to cope, and a sense that people cared about them.

The transcripts clearly show graphic facilitation was an accessible and helpful strategy. The youth described how the graphics or "maps" helped them gain a better understanding of their circumstances, organize their thoughts, set goals, and commit. Having a personally relevant, concrete plan was described by the youth as extremely helpful to the success they were experiencing.

Most compelling, however, are the youth reflections about how the process resulted in personal connections with their facilitators, teachers, and family members. The narratives of youth are important in this regard. There is a power imbalance between youth who struggle with emotional and behavior concerns and

the people in their eco-systems who are supposed to help them. None of the youth described any sense of entitlement to that support, however. In fact, the youth described how they needed support but did not know how to access it until they engaged in the RENEW process. The youth expressed gratitude for that support and described how the RENEW facilitators were non-judgmental, patient, and supportive of the youth's ideas, which develops that sense of trust and caring. The youth described the importance of someone taking the time to provide guidance and problem-solving with them. The youth clearly associated these actions with caring, which leads to better emotional attachment, and efficacy, fueling greater motivation and optimism to achieve their goals. Further, the youth described how they developed more positive relationships with parents, teachers, and administrators as a result of asking for help. Having a supportive ecosystem was clearly important to every youth and is a critical feature of resilience.

Study Limitations

Although the youth narratives reflect resilience, there are limitations to this study. First, qualitative research is helpful for illuminating the experiences of individuals, understanding cultural contexts, and theory-building; however, it does not indicate the RENEW intervention is efficacious or results in more resilient youth. In other words, we cannot conclude from this study that RENEW builds resilience. Further, the small number of participants limits the generalizability of these results. There is also a possibility of bias in the analysis given that the authors, facilitators, and research assistants are White and identify as female. In this analysis, however, the narratives of the African American youth were not substantially different than those of the White youth. The exception was that several of the African American youth mentioned the importance of working and linking to other concrete supports such as getting a job, while White youth rarely talked about this.

This study was also limited as there was also no opportunity for debriefing or checking back with students for confirmation of the results after their interviews. While the qualitative method has gained credibility in disciplines such as nursing, data analysis and interpretation can be time consuming and fraught with variability. The strength of qualitative research, however, is that it can illuminate rich and crucial details of human experience (Anderson, 2010).

Finally, this study is also limited in its focus on the development of individual resilience factors, and only scratches the surface in its examination of environmental or ecological indicators of resilience. The questions used in the study were intentionally broad to avoid leading or influencing how youth responded. The researchers did not want to plant the idea that RENEW was impacting their perspectives, and thus broad, open-ended questions were used. A deeper examination of each youth's history narrative and more specific questions directed at how they perceived the influence of school practices along with an analysis of the resources they received through their connections to people on their RENEW teams may have allowed for a deeper understanding of the influence of ecology on their perceptions. In general, further research on the impact of ecology on changes in youth resilience would provide valuable information for intervention.

Conclusion

The student narratives presented here offer an avenue for further inquiry of the impact of youth-driven transition planning using graphic facilitation on building resilience. The analysis also shows youth value the development of positive relationships to access social and instrumental support as they seek to overcome adversity. Sadly, most schools and community systems that interact with youth who are struggling with emotional and behavioral concerns use strategies based on power and control or planning interventions where the adults determine the goals. The narratives presented here show youth who are struggling with emotional and behavioral issues and who are disengaged from school can be given control over their planning and decisions and that, in fact, doing so may be resilience-building. The youth in this study valued interactions where their ideas and perspectives were heard and respected. They described how demeaned they felt when adults told them what to do, or worse, ignored the complex issues outside of school that impacted their ability to ability to do well in school. Youth described how the expertise of others is helpful, but only when given with respect to and acknowledgement of their own specific context, goals, and self-described needs. Finally, the youth described the pride and change in perspective they felt as they began to achieve goals they thought were out of their reach, such as passing classes and graduating from high school.

Social workers in schools can play a key role in delivering interventions to transition-age youth with emotional and behavioral challenges using an empowerment, strengths-based approach. In addition to treatments focused on building individual skills, social workers can also provide positive, forward-looking strategies such as person-centered planning, structured decision making, and linkages to positive relationships and resources. Working in collaboration with school staff, special educators, and classroom teachers, social workers can play a key role in linking the resources in the school to the resources in the family and community by facilitating youth-led teams and focusing the teamwork on the goals the youth have articulated. The core elements of RENEW -person-centered planning using graphic facilitation, youth-led teaming and facilitation, and a focus on school-to-career development- can lead to the development of youth resilience and positive outcomes by building optimism, self-efficacy, improved emotional and behavioral competence, and long-term positive relationships. In short, using these techniques can prepare at-risk youth for greater success as they move into adulthood.

A major target of the work going forward is to build the capacities of the family, schools, and community eco-systems to respond to youth in ways that build their capacity to reflect on and understand what they have experienced, understand where they are today, and look ahead to a satisfying future. The research clearly points to what we need to do. We need to remove the structural barriers and our need for control on both the individual and institutional levels. We need to develop equal partnerships with youth and apply humanist approaches, believing that every youth who has experienced adversity is capable of "making it" and feeling valued by others.

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Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Over the past year and a half, how much progress have you made in your life toward your goals?

    a. In home, school, community?

    b. What has helped you make progress?

2. What have school people done that you found helpful? Be specific if you can. What things did school people do that was particularly helpful? What surprised you?

3. What things happened or what did school people do that you find not helpful?

4. How much control of the decisions and choices you were making did you feel you had? What was helpful there?

5. To what extent do you feel like you've been able to overcome or address challenges over the past year?

    a. Did you do this by yourself or with help? Who helped you?

6. What are some important relationships have you built over the past year?

    a. What has contributed to your success in building relationships?

    b. What added resources or supports have you discovered over the past couple of years?

7. When you found out which group for the study you were in, how did you feel and react? How did your family react?

8. We did a lot of surveys and data collection to try to find out about your experiences.