

LEARNING FROM YOUTHS' NARRATIVES OF CHANGE AND PARENTAL TREATMENT EXPECTATIONS TO GUIDE OUTCOME MEASUREMENT: A FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS AND SENSE OF SELF

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INTRODUCTION

- Since 60% to 80% of adolescents hospitalized due to mental problems have coexisting addiction (Swadi & Bobier, 2003), programs that treat both are essential.
- Residential treatment is an intervention that has been shown to reduce youths' internalizing symptoms as well as high-risk behaviours such as suicidality (Knorth, Harder, Zandberg, & Kendrick, 2008).
- Research on residential programs is inconsistent in the outcomes reported, including: substance use, academics, criminality, emotional distress, social functioning, physical health, self-worth, autonomy, family isolation, abusive relationships (Balsa, Homer, French, & Weisner, 2009; Shane, Jasiukaitis, & Green, 2003; Harrison & Ashe, 2001; Spooner, Mattick, & Noffs, 2001; Hawke, Hennen, & Galliione, 2005).
- Little is known about the outcomes of residential programs such as Pine River Institute, which combines multiple treatment modalities.

PINE RIVER INSTITUTE (PRI)

- PRI began in 2006 as a program for youth struggling with substance abuse and mental health issues.
- Program combines wilderness therapy, residential treatment and family therapy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What changes do parents expect youth to make in Pine River's program?
2. What are the main changes youths make due to their experiences in the program?

METHOD - Study 1 - Parents

- 28 applications were randomly selected from a pool of 638 parent applications to the program.
- Seven questions related to parents' expectations of treatment were selected for analysis.
- Data were coded by four independent coders using thematic analysis (Braun, & Clarke, 2006) and a consensual qualitative research strategy (CQR; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997).
- In Phase One, each coder was assigned a group of five cases for independent coding before coming together to build a preliminary model through consensus.
- In Phase Two, each coder was assigned another analyst's phase one cases, as well as five new cases.
- In Phase Three, all coders analyzed all 28 cases and built the final model collectively.

RESULTS - Study 1 - Parents

PARENT EXPECTATIONS

- Parents wanted to create a more supportive family environment for their youth with greater mutual respect and communication, and wanted their youth to rebuild damaged family relationships.
- Parents had concerns that youth would refuse treatment, wouldn't stay in the program, wouldn't show any improvement or might get worse due to contagion.
- Parents wanted youth to have greater mental wellness, including better coping strategies, emotion regulation, more joy, healing, and balance/stability.
- Parents hoped youth would develop a greater sense of self, namely more self-confidence and greater responsibility.
- Only 10% of comments related to observable behaviour, such as sobriety and youth using their time productively.
- Parents expected youth to develop greater insight, including insight into the impact of their drug use.
- Parents wanted youth to engage in goal setting, reach their potential and make progress academically.

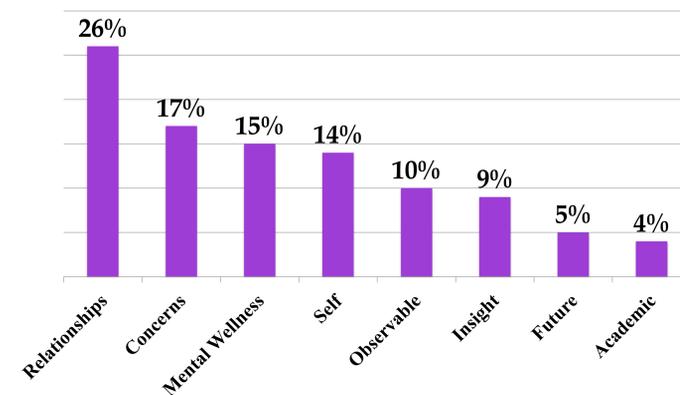


Figure 1. Eight Main Categories of Parent Treatment Expectations.

METHOD - Study 2 - Youths

- First author engaged in program weekly for 8 months.
- Staff explained project to parents, then youth.
- Parental consent obtained for 24 of 34 youth (71%).
- Interviews conducted with a total of ten youth.
- Six youth volunteered to participate in the project, remaining four were selected to ensure diversity.
- Sample was 70% male to reflect the population at PRI.
- Interview was semi-structured.
- Thematic analysis used to analyze the transcripts.
- NVivo software used to organize and code text.

RESULTS - Study 2 - Youths

BEFORE PINE RIVER

- Youths described relationships as unhealthy and distant.
- Youths had experienced loneliness, trauma, and abuse.
- Emotional problems included: sadness, lack of self-esteem, emotional dysregulation and self-harm.
- Youth described themselves as unmotivated and in denial.
- Before PRI, youth engaged in destructive behaviours such as skipping school and stealing from friends/ family.
- Youth used substances to suppress/cope with strong emotions and believed people in their lives did not understand why they were using substances.

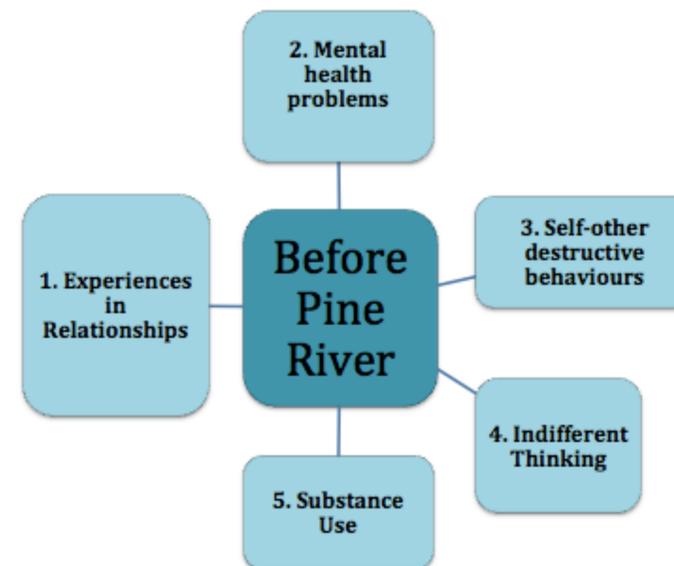


Figure 2. Youths' Descriptions of their Lives Before the Program.

CHANGES

- Youths learned how to have healthy relationships, set new expectations for future relationships and redefine relationships with old friends.
- Their family functioning improved – families had closer relationships, more trust, and respectful communication.
- Youths reported changes in their sense of self, including greater self-confidence, maturity and valuing themselves.
- After PRI, youths reported being more emotionally balanced, more aware of their triggers, better able to cope with strong emotions, and more happy overall.
- Youths reported more insightful, future-oriented thinking.
- Three of ten youths were committed to being sober.

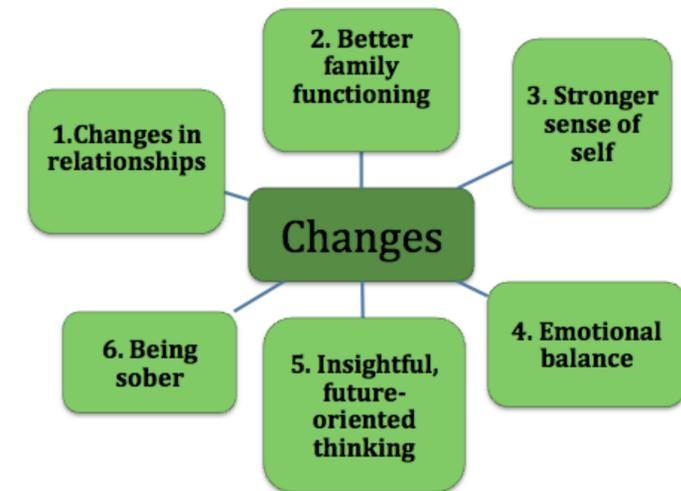


Figure 3. Youths' descriptions of the changes they made in the program

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

- Parents and youths discussed changes in relationships as the single most important outcome of treatment. Parents hoped for more mutual respect and communication, which youths discussed as well.
- Parents expected youth to re-engage with positive peer relationships and discontinue negative ones, which aligned with youths' narratives of change.
- Parents and youths highlighted the importance of mental wellness as a treatment outcome; not as a reduction in the symptoms of mental health diagnoses, but instead as the development of positive mental health (e.g., joy, balance, enjoyment of life, coping, emotion regulation, etc.).
- Both parties focused on youth developing a stronger sense of self, namely greater self-confidence, identity development and maturity.
- These results highlight the multi-faceted nature of the issues faced by youth and the changes youth make.
 - Therefore, programs must measure more than behavioural outcomes, such as substance use.
- Research on the process of change is continuing at PRI.

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