

GROUP INTERVENTION PROJECT BY SAVA

Support for independent living

(French acronym: SAVA)

is a project whose purpose is to develop intervention tools to help prepare youth receiving services from youth centres for independent living and support them as they leave care.

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Project Overview...

This presents the main results of study on the implementation, testing and evaluation of six intervention groups set up between 2009 and 2011 in two geographical regions (Montreal and Abitibi) whose aim was to support the transition of youth to adult life.

All groups were led with a specific clinical approach focusing on group facilitation and fostering mutual support among participants. In this approach, the worker becomes a facilitator, whose goal is to guide participants and to allow the evolution of a group dynamic where each participant uses their evolution knowledge, skills and potential in their interactions with the others. The objective then becomes to support the group process and encourage each one of its participants rather than the transmission of content through various activities.

The three aspects of research are...

1. To better understand the unique features of the transition to adulthood of two target groups (young mothers and Aboriginal youth).
2. To implement, test and evaluate a group intervention program designed to support these youth in their transition to adulthood.
3. To improve and validate a clinical support tool.

THE PROJECT'S OBJECTIVES ARE...

Develop an alternative intervention paradigm to support the transition to adulthood in youth centers.

Conduct an analysis of the implementation of groups at both sites and analyze the effects of the groups on youth and workers.

Implement group interventions that place active participation of young people at the heart of the intervention process

Group intervention as an important means to support the transition of young people to adulthood.

Supporting young people's transition to adult life is a growing concern for youth workers and administrators. Various programs are implemented to better prepare and support young people in their passage. The *Youth Qualification* program, introduced in Quebec's network of youth centers, is, in this regard, an innovative program that provides assistance through a significant relationship with a counsellor over time. However, group intervention has received little attention in this and similar programs, as well as in interventions focused mainly on the transmission of knowledge or life skills.

Group intervention opens up opportunities that are not always accessible to workers who accompany youths on an individual basis. Groups allow for the development of support between young people, promotes identification with peers who may experience similar situations, and brings about self-reflection through modelling by others. The group's focus on participation allows young people to play a proactive role in the process of collective decision-making and encourages them to move forward by drawing from the sense of power and solidarity emanating from the group. Accordingly, the group provides an opportunity to experiment with autonomy.

IMPLEMENTATION...

Phase 1: Preparation

- Adapting the programs
- Training workers in the approach.
- Recruiting young people.

Phase 2: Implementation

Six groups set up at three different sites between 2009 and 2011

Phase 3: Feedback

A mid-term review by the trainers with an assessment meeting at the end of the implementation period.

THREE PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN TESTED

Friendship Group (“Moi et cie”)

This program, implemented with two groups of girls, deals primarily with interpersonal relationships, social skills and self-esteem. In this intervention, the way in which relationships develop between participants and counsellors also provides a model for appropriate interactions.

Movin' On (“Droit devant”)

The main objective of this program is to provide opportunities for young people who are approaching the age of emancipation and will soon be leaving care to express and explore the difficult emotions associated with their departure. Specifically, the program aims to make participants aware of the potential impact of their emotional state during the transition to independence. It also aims to encourage mutual support throughout the process of seeking solutions, enabling them to better manage this stage of their lives.

“D’Hier à demain” (From Yesterday to Tomorrow)

The program “d’Hier à demain” is a group intervention program for Algonquin youth entering adulthood. Developed around the principles of the Medicine Wheel, it aims to provide participants with a time and place to explore the different facets of the transition to adult life in a climate of mutual assistance and sharing.

THE EVALUATION

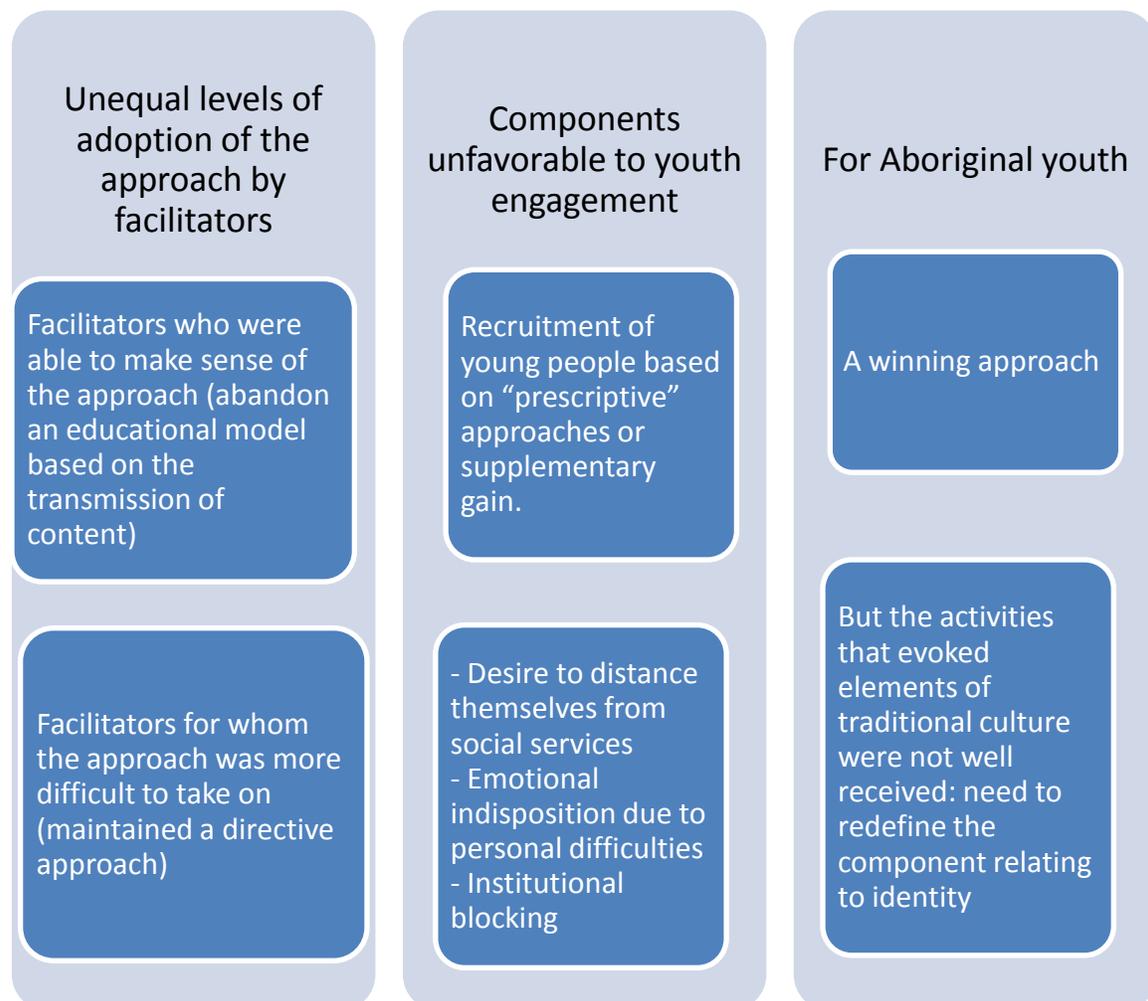
Evaluation methodology

Both the evaluation of the implementation of the groups and their effects were primarily conducted through qualitative analysis of interviews with young people and facilitators at two different times: before and after having experienced the group.

Young people were also asked to fill out standardized pre- and post-test questionnaires to measure the effects of the programs according to different scales.

Finally, all participants completed a questionnaire on their initial reasons for participating in the group after the eight group sessions had ended.

Implementation analysis: three main findings.



MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Their experience with groups has allowed most facilitators to question their practices in relation to youth transitioning to adulthood. The experimental use of groups has played a part in the early stages of a long process of transformation of practices that could take place in intervention circles.

The planning process of the groups has a significant influence on the development of a sense of unity among the participants of the group. Any kind of break in the continuity of the sessions, especially when the program is of short duration, should be avoided. It is also important to select youth who are at the same point in their lives in order to promote the creation of bonds and foster interest for the group.

The collaboration of all youth centre counsellors around a comprehensive intervention strategy where everyone agrees on the leading value of the group program may greatly facilitate the attendance and active involvement of young people within the group. This finding highlights the importance of an organizational context in which clinical practices can be introduced, especially when they are innovative and likely to produce change. In other words, it is necessary to prepare intervention circles well when it comes to establishing new group intervention programs within the curricula of clinical activities.

The attitude of youth towards group intervention programs depends, among other things, on their past and how they experienced previous services. The implementation of an intervention does not go without consideration of these sensitivities, which have a major impact on the subsequent participation of young people in any intervention process.

And for Aboriginal groups ...

An approach based on mutual aid is coherent with the cultural norms of non-interference. It also opens up the possibility of creating egalitarian and meaningful relationships between young people and social intervention workers, which are consistent with cultural norms. Groupwork nevertheless presents additional challenges when set up in communities characterized by intense relationships and physical proximity between its members.

MAIN ANALYSIS

The analysis was based on a mixed methodology, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative tools.

The qualitative aspect

Thematic analysis of comments made by youth and facilitators highlights the program's capacity to allow for group dynamics that are constructive, in that they provide support for youth in their path to independence.

The group, from the youth's perspective...

The group as a space for mutual assistance

- "I don't like talking about myself with people who are older than me or with people like my parents. But here there are people who understand me. They say things like "Yeah I've gone through that too." You know, everyone was sharing their stuff with me and it was interesting. Sometimes their stuff was a lot like mine. "

The group as a space for building awareness

- "We looked at what is a friend. We played games, we really turned it into a game and then, we had a discussion. I had never really done that before, paid attention to what a friend really was."

The group as a space of ownership

- "It was different because that was our place where we could talk. In the other groups, we just had these things to follow, but there, it was our place to talk. (...) It was like a collective. (...) We shared stuff and it stayed confidential."

The group as a space for validation

- "It gave me one more activity to show the world that I could continue and do other stuff to leave this place."

TWO INTERESTING CONCLUSIONS...

How do the group support young people's transition to adulthood ?

<p>By inviting young people to position themselves in respect to issues that concern them, as well as by providing opportunities to feel valued on a personal level and, from there, to steer their lives in a direction that they themselves consider constructive, the group provides the youth with the possibility of developing their identity.</p>	<p>The group also presents itself as a mediation tool, allowing weakened social ties with both counsellors and other young people to be reconstructed. Notably, group work seems to be an excellent mediation tool between young people and social services, as it provides an opportunity for young people to develop a close relationship with counsellors. Thus, young people who start out with a rather negative perception of social services can gradually begin to develop trust. In addition, the creation of quality ties contributes, more broadly, to a better sense of social affiliation and the creation of a stronger support network around the youth. One counsellor talked about the close ties he maintained with the young participants of the group, built on mutual authenticity.</p>
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The quantitative aspect: some results

The significantly high pre-test scores, recorded on all scales, greatly reduced the probability that the program would lead to improvements in the young people's circumstances. One of the hypotheses put forth by the research team was that the scaling system may have lacked sensitivity to pick up on challenges faced by youth in the pre-test phase.

Another conclusion of the quantitative assessment: the programs produced very different results for each youth. While some saw their situation improve, others saw just the opposite.

Standardized tools are therefore best used in conjunction with a qualitative method of analysis that gives an account of the subtleties of the effects observed and provides for a comprehensive view of the related contextual factors.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion...

Enlightened by this study,, we were able to produce avenues to consider not only in the event that the programs should be renewed, but also, from a broader perspective, in order to shed light on the challenges posed by the transformation of intervention practices aimed at supporting young people in their processes of transition towards adulthood.

This research raises three major concerns...

Some intervention practices are deeply ingrained in our systems of care.

The perception of autonomy as an end in and of itself, rather than a process over time, persists.

The attempt to install life skills as youth exit care does not address the actual needs of young people transiting to adulthood.

Many of the youth participants in this research experienced their involvement in a group as different from anything that they had experienced before. They criticized their care settings as authoritarian, and saw many of the activities as boring. Group work that focuses on the increased participation of young people can provide an experience of intervention that is empowering and, according to the youth participants in this study, is in stark contrast to usual practices, where their input is not valued.

One of the central issues raised by this research is the role of youth participation in interventions that support the transition to adulthood.

For more information on this research, see the full report in the publication section on the site:

<http://www.crevaj.enaq.ca/>

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