Rehabilitation for Empowerment, Natural Supports, Education, and Work

Rehabilitation for Empowerment, Natural Supports, Education, and Work (RENEW) is designed to help youth with emotional or behavioural disorders transition from school to adult life. A trained facilitator and support team work with the youth to design and pursue a school-to-career transition plan using a personalized, community-based approach that takes into consideration available adult support systems.1

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Population

The intervention is designed for youth with behavioural or emotional issues. It has been used in various settings (school, community, residential, juvenile justice, mental health, rural, urban, and suburban). In the following three demonstration projects, youth enrolled had a range of characteristics:
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- Project RENEW – Participants were 16 to 22 years old and had a serious mental illness or serious emotional disturbance as defined by a mental health provider (e.g., 25% had schizophrenia). Most youth had a disability, such as a learning disability, and unstable living conditions (for example, they were in foster care or not living with their parents). Thirty-eight percent had co-occurring substance use issues.¹
- Nashua Youth Re-entry Project – Participants were 14 to 17 years old, were receiving mental health services or were eligible for special education, and were involved with the criminal justice system (i.e., removed from their school and home due to delinquency).²
- APEX Project – Participants were 16 to 22 years old, were at risk of dropping out of school and had behavioural or social problems (not necessarily mental-health related).³

Key Components

The intervention includes a ‘toolbox’ of eight key strategies, selected for each youth based on their goals and needs.¹ These strategies are:

- Personal futures planning - Considered the “lynchpin of the process.”¹ Involves creating a meaningful plan based on the individual’s own “perspective on his or her history, current network of people and supports, strengths, dislikes, dreams, and concerns;”¹
- Alternative education options - Designed to ensure the youth finishes high school.
- School-to-career transition strategies - Involves school-based and work-based learning experiences;
- Naturally-supported employment – Intended to help the youth develop an understanding of real-world expectations;
- Individualized resource development - Designed to identify needed supports and resources in a variety of areas;
- Individually developed teams - Involves people who are willing and able to offer solutions and help the youth overcome barriers;
- Mentoring by someone who has qualities that the youth admires - Designed to “help the young person make valuable new social connections, build social and career skills, and develop a positive sense of self”¹;
- Sustainable community connections - Consists of planned experiences in settings where the youth feels comfortable (e.g. school, job, gym), intended to help the youth develop social skills and connections after they grow out of children’s services.
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Youth work with a trained facilitator and a support team to develop an individualized, student-directed, school-to-career plan that aims to help them achieve four main goals\(^1\):

- Finish high school;
- Find a job;
- Access post-secondary education and training; and
- Become a part of the community.

**Resources Required/ Feasibility**

Success depends on a highly trained facilitator who is trained on how to use the RENEW strategies. Many tools are available online, though the intervention’s developers recommend direct facilitator training to maintain fidelity to the intervention.

**Evidence**

The RENEW intervention was informed by “best practices and strategies from a variety of disciplines,” including community mental health (using wraparound principles).\(^1\) Preliminary evidence from three demonstration projects in the US show that after the intervention, youth had improved satisfaction with school and work, higher graduation and employment rates, better emotional and behavioural functioning, and successful justice-to-community transitions.\(^1,2,3,4\) For example, in one justice-related demonstration project, most of the youth interviewed felt that the intervention was beneficial and that coordination between agencies played a role in their successful transition.\(^3\)

Only one of the demonstration projects was a quantitative, peer-reviewed evaluation.\(^3\) In this study from the APEX school dropout prevention project, 20 youth with behavioural or social problems voluntarily met regularly for one year with one of two highly trained RENEW facilitators working at their high school. The youth participated in two of the RENEW strategies—personal futures planning and individualized resource development.

The researchers used the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale to evaluate the youth before they entered the program and after they participated for one year. They found that participants had significantly better functioning after the intervention in the following areas: moods/emotions, home, school/work, and self-harmful behaviour. There were no changes in other areas, including substance abuse, ability to use rational thought processes, respect for the rights and property of others and conformity to laws, and behaviour toward others.
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While some encouraging results came out of this study, due to the methods used to assess the youth before and after the intervention, it’s difficult to conclude that the outcomes were caused by the intervention. Also the sample was small and included self-selected students who were highly engaged with the RENEW facilitators.¹

In summary, there is limited published evidence of effectiveness. However, the intervention was based on evidence-informed principles and showed some preliminary positive outcomes.

Readiness for Replication

The Institute on Disability offers training and coaching to individuals and groups in community-based agencies and schools, including:

- A comprehensive facilitator’s manual;
- Tools to use with youth and teams;
- Implementation assessments; and
- Process and outcome data collection instruments.

In a three-day training program, participants learn how to engage youth in the RENEW process, help them map out their personal futures, develop individualized and youth-specific resources, direct the team process, conduct school-to-career planning, and empower the youth to lead the process. Trainers give an overview of the system supports needed to ensure the intervention is implemented successfully. This is the first step in the RENEW certification process.

The RENEW facilitator’s manual is available for $30 US and contains the following resources⁵:

Data collection

- Process checklist;
- Individual progress tracker, parts 1 and 2;
- Student progress tracker;
- Futures plan tracker;
- Readiness and systems checklist;
- Integrity tool kit to assess fidelity of implementation, professional development needs of facilitators, and quality of service delivery;
- Survey of youth and family involvement in teams (youth and parent questionnaires).
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Youth assessments and agreements

- Needs and strengths checklist;
- Roles and responsibilities agreement;
- Team facilitation and planning;
- Youth/team plan;
- Action plan;
- Collaborative team process checklist;
- Resource mapping checklist.

Education

- Education checklist.

Career planning

- Credit gap analysis;
- Career research worksheet;
- Information interview;
- What’s on my high school transcript?
- My network;
- What is a resume?

The Institute on Disability also helps schools, community-based service providers, and state education and mental health agencies to put in place the systems and infrastructure they need to implement the intervention with fidelity.

Sustainability

The success of RENEW programs relies on the ongoing commitment from and support of a variety of individuals, including a trained facilitator. Training and education will need to be maintained as new staff join the team, job functions change, and other human resources-based challenges occur.
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References
We welcome your feedback!

This summary is one of a number of transition/continuity of care practice summaries developed by EENet and the Performance Measurement and Implementation Research (PMIR) team, which are part of the Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). The purpose is to support the selection of an evidence-informed intervention by Ontario’s Systems Improvement through Service Collaboratives (SISC) initiative. It was designed to give the reader a starting point in understanding the intervention along a number of dimensions.

The intervention summarized in this document was identified through a targeted search of the scholarly and grey literature, and key informant suggestions. The summary was developed from a selected review of reports and journal articles. The evidence review section examined quantitative effectiveness studies only. Other issues, such as acceptability to users and cost effectiveness, are also important to examine but were out of scope to review in the available time frame.

This summary is a living document and the information on which it is based may evolve over time. While great care was taken to prepare this summary, we acknowledge the possibility of human error due to search limitations and rapid timelines. Therefore, we do not warrant that the information contained in this document is fully current, accurate, or complete. If you have any comments or suggestions to improve its content, please contact us at eenet@camh.ca.