



# **What Makes a Difference for Transition Age Youth with Mental Health Needs? Comparing Experiences of European American and African American Youth**



Research and Training Center  
on Family Support and  
Children's Mental Health

Presented at:  
**Washington State Adolescent  
Health Care Conference  
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# Presenters



- Jean Kruzich -University of Washington School of Social Work- Seattle, WA
- Chris Clark - Youth 'N Action - Tacoma, WA
- Tamara Johnson -Youth 'N Action- Seattle, WA
- Rion Tisino -Youth 'N Action - Youth Coordinator, Western Washington
- Youth 'N Action Panel –Youth 'N Action- State-wide, WA

# Study Objectives



- This presentation is based on a sub sample of the 59 youth participants and includes low income European American (EA) and African American (AA) transition-age youth with mental health needs.
- This presentation focuses on:
  - Youth perceptions of community integration in the personal, family & friends, school, community, work, and social services domains.
  - Barriers and supports for community integration.

# Research Methods

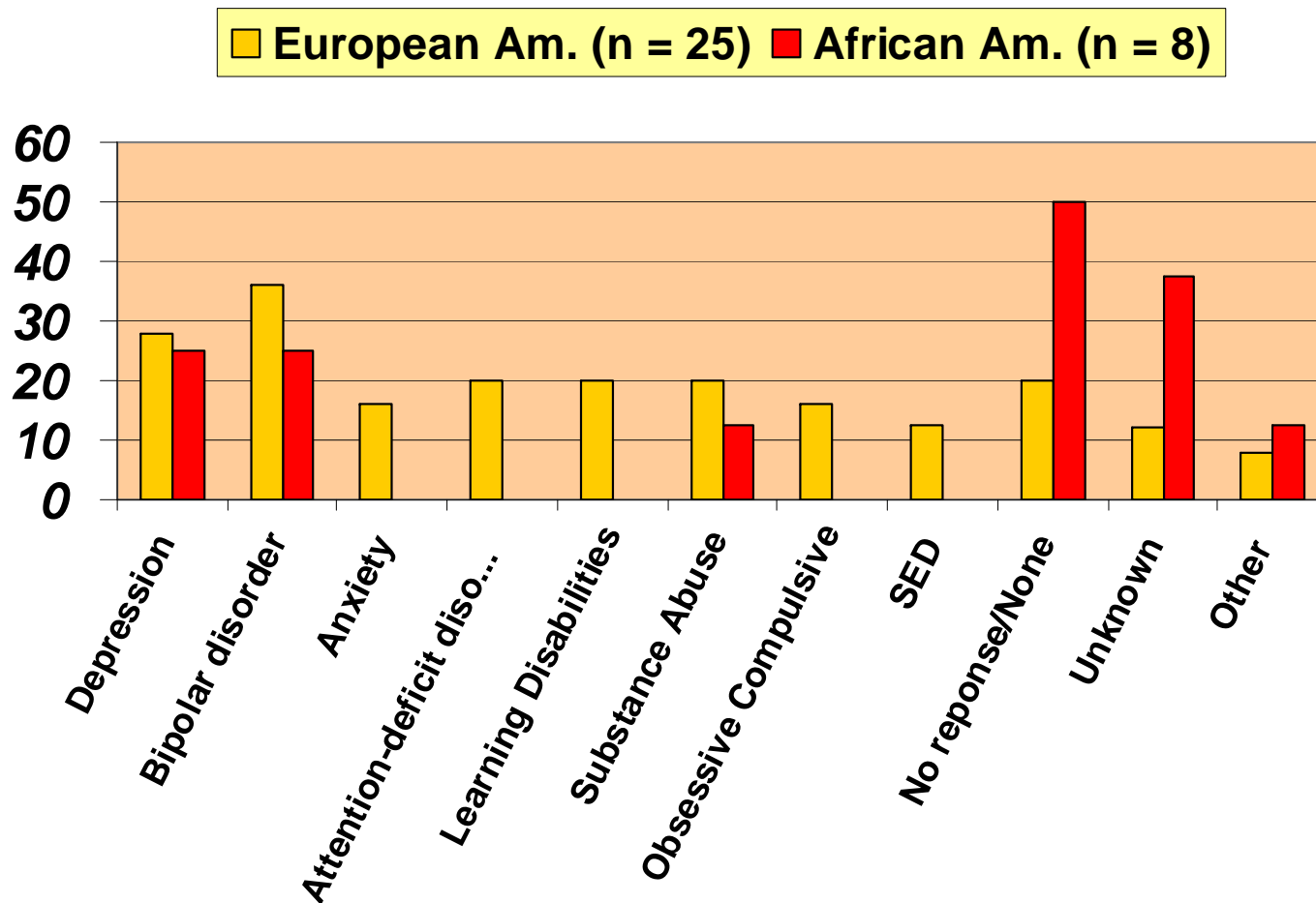


- Consultation with advisory groups of youths aged 17-24 to develop focus group questions and plan recruitment.
- Recruitment of youth to participate in focus groups through contacts with schools, colleges, family support organizations, and mental health agencies.
- Youth research assistants (who had experience with mental health services themselves) took lead roles in moderating groups.
- Participants also completed a pre-focus group demographics and service use questionnaire and received \$30.
- Focus group discussions were audio-taped, transcribed, and entered into *N6* qualitative analysis software.

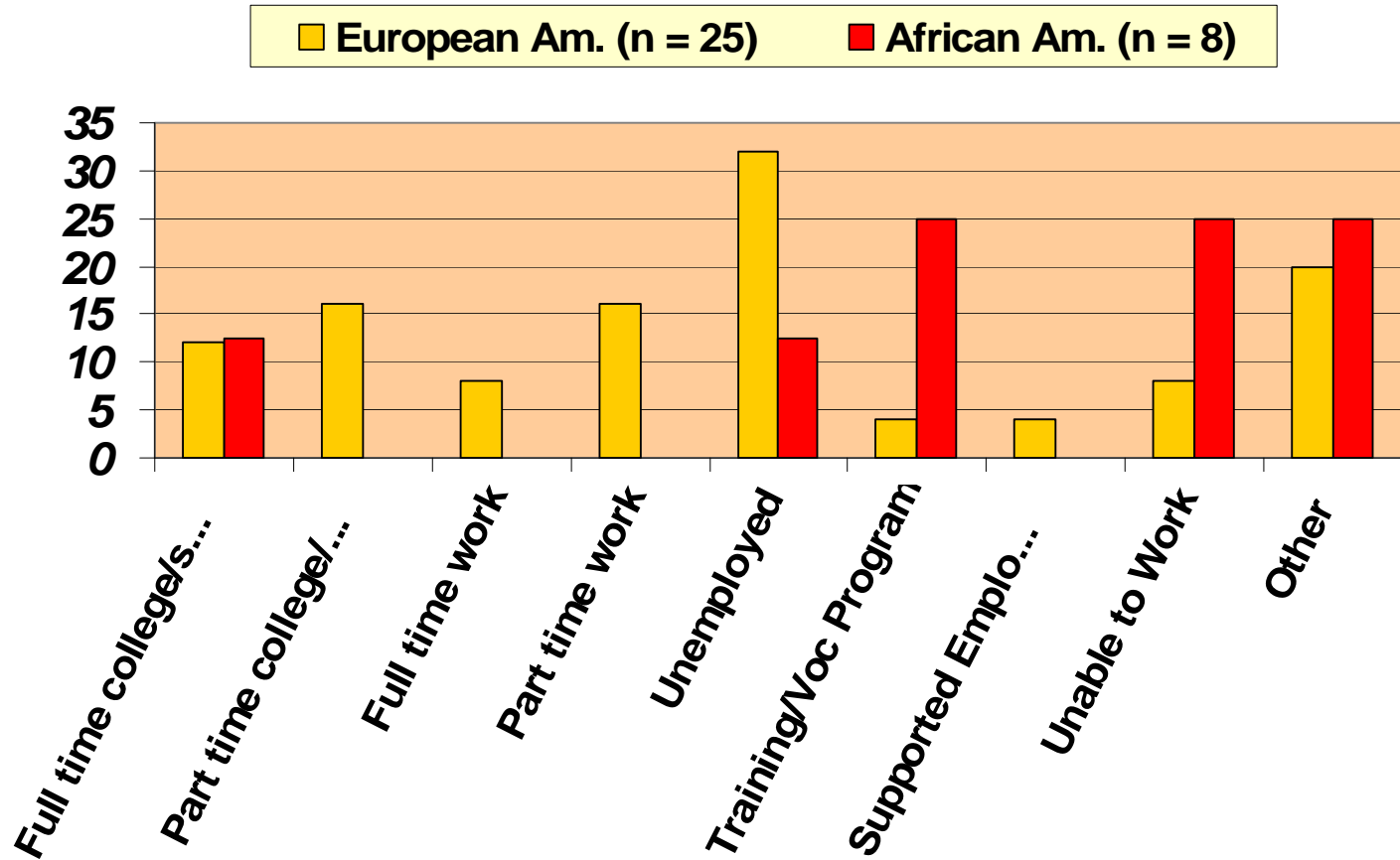
# Focus Group Participants

	<b>European-American (n = 25)</b>	<b>African-American (n = 8)</b>
<b>Age</b>	Mean 18.2; range 16-23	Mean 19.4; range 15-23
<b>Gender</b>	72% male	62% male
<b>Level of School</b>	20% in school/GED prgm.; 40% <H.S.; 40% H.S. or GED	0% in school/GED prgm.; 63% <H.S.; 37% H.S. or GED
<b>Living with parents</b>	54%	38%
<b>Living with roommates</b>	13%	0%
<b>Living alone</b>	13%	25%
<b>Living with extended family</b>	17%	25%
<b>Other living situation (e.g., homeless)</b>	13%	13%

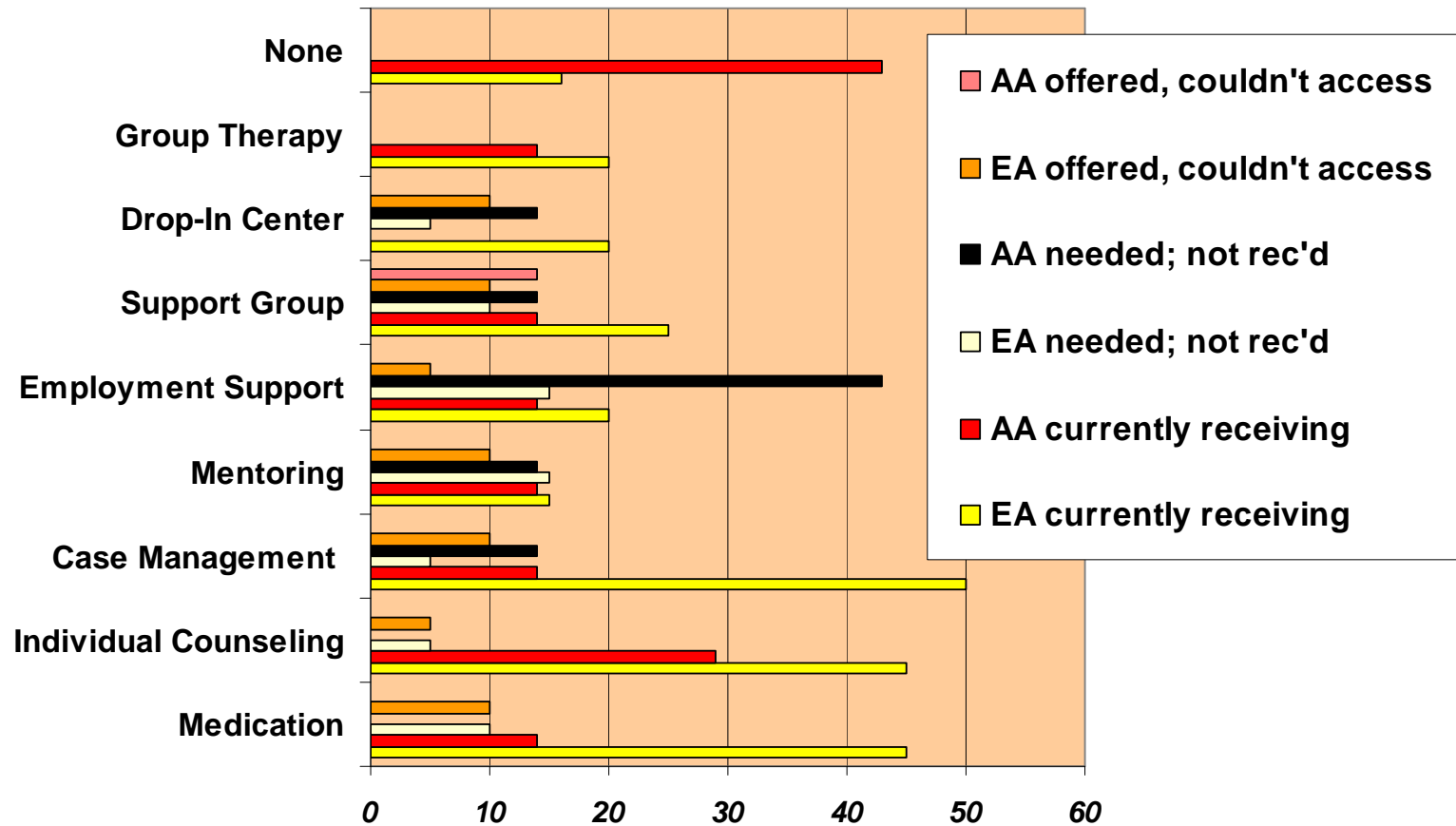
# Youth-Reported Mental Health Diagnoses (percentage by group)

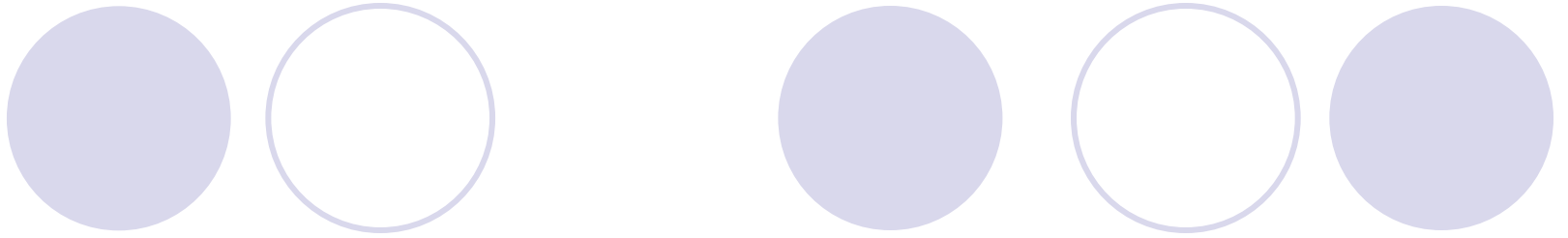


# Youth Involvement in Work and School (percentage by group)



# Youth Use of, and Access to, Mental Health Services (percentage by condition)





# Chris Clark

age: 20 Tacoma, WA

# Personal: Shared Barriers

## *Personal Responsibility*

- “I'm crazy, so nobody holds me back but myself.”
- “I was my biggest obstacle. I was my own weapon of mass destruction.”

## *Not Graduating from High School*

- “The most trouble I ever got in school was detention. One thing, and they kicked me out.”

# Personal: Shared Barriers

## *Substance Use*

- “If you can't pass a UA, you can't get the job.”
- “Drugs and alcohol; that's what holding me back right now. I know that I need to work on it.”

# Personal: Shared Barriers

## *Lack of Economic Resources*

- “When you go to fill out an application and you don't have a permanent address or a phone number that you can be reached at, If you live in a place like me (youth shelter), you can only make phone calls after 8:00. It is hard to get hold of any employers at that time.”
- “Just to go fishing you need to buy a thing of worms, you have to have money. You have to have gas.”

# Personal: Shared Barriers

## *Criminal Record*

- “A lot of time you can't get an apartment because of your criminal background.”
- “A criminal record is a big one. It stopped me from working, getting financial resources, and succeeding in school.”

## *Probation*

- “My barrier is probation and all this treatment stuff that I have to do. It costs money and it takes time. I have to pay probation \$50 a month. I have to go there once a week.”
- “Once you are in the system they own you, you have a probation officer, you have to do what they say, and I want to get out of that, and get into school.”

# Personal: Barriers Unique to AA

## *Getting pregnant/becoming a parent*

- “Having kids at an early age, drugs, dropping out of school. Just trying to be a grown too early, just grow up too fast.”
- “Mine was I had a baby, but I was going to school and I only had two weeks left until I graduated, but I had to drop out.”
- “I got shot and then got a baby on the way and I already have a baby. I am a parent at a young age. I've got to face reality.”

# Personal: Barriers Unique to EA

## *Lack of motivation/Depression*

- "Emotional problems are the worst. When my depression is bad, I have no motivation whatsoever you only want to lay there until you die."

## *Isolation/Avoidance and Anxiety*

- "I just mostly block myself out from everybody and just barricade myself in my room."
- "I think a lot of people who have bipolar and things like that are worried about what other people are going to say, what other people are going to do, are afraid to even expose themselves to anybody because of that."
- "I would have loved to have had the confidence the last couple of weeks to have signed up or looked into college, but as I said, the confidence kind of fell through. So yet again, I didn't do that."

# Personal: Supports Unique to AA

## *Spiritual and Religious Beliefs*

- “I just really need to read the Bible and get insight and some kind of encouragement to be able to see the world for what it is. The Bible is a comfort. It will get you through life.”
- "God is the thing that keeps me going.”
- "I just go with my spirituality. I believe that is what my higher power wants me to do, is to help out people, work with people.”

# Personal: Supports Unique to EA

## *Computers, Video Games and Reading*

- "I'm usually home, TV, computer games, something."
- "The only out that I have is books, just reading. I just sit and read."
- "My room, X-Box, TV, speakers."

## *Outdoor Activities*

- "I like to go to the park or the mountains. I like going swimming at the lake and jumping off cliffs."
- "I feel connected at the beach. Whether I am alone or with a friend, it doesn't really matter. I can kind of reflect back on my life at the beach."

# Family & Friends: Shared Barriers

## *Familial Substance Abuse*

- “Everybody in my family smokes weed, like my aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, everybody.”
- “I have never known my father. My mom is a meth addict, coke, crack you name it. I've never celebrated my birthday. I have never had a Christmas. I had to take care of myself and cook my own food when my neighbor stopped doing it at seven years old I had to take care of myself than.”

# Family & Friends: Shared Barriers

## *Child Maltreatment*

- “I have a lot of stress and anxiety from childhood stuff that I still put up with every day.”
- “I was too hell-bent on getting revenge for my childhood because my dad used to whoop my ass and my mom wasn't there, so I was going to show them.”

## *Negative Peer Group*

- “Hanging out with old friends led to my relapse. I had figured when I got out of drug treatment I could get together with my old friends and not use. It only took 5 minutes being around them and I was using again.”

# Family & Friends: Shared Supports

## *Places*

- “...The safe place for me to go to would be like dinner or whatever; I would go straight to my auntie's house or my mother's house with my daughter.”
- I like to go to my mom's house and watch TV and stuff. It is nice. The air is so much cleaner than here, too.”

## *People*

- “ It is just somebody you feel comfortable talking to, who knows what you have been through and probably been through it with you.”

# Family & Friends: Supports Unique to AA

## *Street Family*

- “We have barbeque sessions and stuff. That is basically family and friends. I aint talking about immediate family. I'm talking about people on the streets that you call family.”
- “Its' important to have relationships with many people, street family, because you learn a lot of stuff.”

## *Fictive Kin*

- “There are older people in my neighborhood, who help me out, non-relatives who I look to for advice, learn things from.”

# School: Shared Barriers

## *Inflexible school policies*

For example, being a few minutes late for class:

- “...*you get detention* ...Then I’ll never go to the damned detentions, because it is a waste of time in the first place. If you don’t go they will suspend you. They basically punish you for just for being late, so why would I want to go to school?”

# School: Barriers Unique to EA

## *Stigma*

- “I was known as Crazy David... That is what people wanted to call me, so that is what people did call me. I knocked a couple kids out because of that.”

## *Lack of information*

- “I didn't even realize that the counselors in high school were actual counselors. I thought they were like secretaries who did your schedule.”

# School: Barriers Unique to EA

## *Lack of help/support*

- “Sometimes I just didn’t understand and when I raise my hand and said, “I don’t get it,” they just wouldn’t take the time that you need.”
- “There was really no support. If you were a really, really troublemaker kind of kid, then you get more support or access.”

# School: Barriers Unique to EA

## *Discounting/shaming staff behaviors*

- “If you are in a regular school and you didn’t do your assignments they write on the board....”Tim has missed this many assignments.”
- “A couple of them would try and embarrass me in front of the class and I would end up cussing them out.”

## *Ineffective, non-individualized teaching*

- “There isn't anything for people who were not visual learners and have to learn by doing or listening”.
- “I learn way better if somebody shows me how to do it, and I do it with my hands instead of having to write it down.”

# School: Barriers Unique to AA

## *Personal factors*

- “I had a baby, but I was going to school, and I only had two weeks left until I graduated, but I had to drop out.”

## *Out of control classrooms*

- "At the high school I went to teachers couldn't control kids in the classroom, all their time was spent on discipline so I didn't learn much."

# School: Shared Supports

*Supportive staff, who make an extra effort*

Both groups of youths identified school staff ‘who go the extra mile’ and ‘who do more than what they are paid for’ as important sources of support.

- o “I had a few teachers that I connected with really well, and I would hide out during lunch in teachers’ rooms and stuff. That was the best part of high school.”
- o [Referring to an alternative educational program] “They actually help the youth try to get up on their feet and get stable in your own life.”

# School: Supports Unique to AA

## *Provision of concrete resources*

A young woman who had become pregnant referred to a specialized program she took part in:

- “There was a place called the Learning Center, and you got your own caseworker. That way if you have to stop going to school because you need to get a job to get stuff, they help you get it.”



# Tamara Johnson

Age: 22 Seattle, WA

# Community: Shared Barriers

## *Police*

- “The police make it harder. They harass you for no reason. Or they harass me for no reason, you know. They pull you over, tell you to drop on the ground. I didn't do nothing. It is stressful.”
- “My mother called the police to ask for help when my older brother was out of control and hurting my little brother and they would not help.”
- “I've been picked up by police twice in the last 4 months. When they found out the warrant wasn't for me they apologized, said they made a mistake but that I'd need to pay for a taxi to take me home. I refused and finally they gave me the money to pay for a cab.”

# Community: Shared Barriers

## *Too old*

- “It’s like when you get to a certain age, Boys and Girls Club they don’t want us there 16, 17 you are kind of out of there.”
- “We go to the Y sometimes, because they have the late night on Fridays. Sometimes they let everybody lift weights and play basketball. But I’m getting kind of old.”

# Community: Supports Unique to EA

## *Volunteering*

- “I volunteer a lot. We have different workdays, at Starbucks. The next one is going to be really cool, graffiti.”
- “There is this little church down the road, and there is barely anybody that goes to it anymore. So they try to make money to keep it going. I help them pass out flyers. The Fourth of July I helped them sell fireworks and stuff. I do a lot of stuff for the church down there.”
- “Teach kids how to skateboard. That is usually what I do.”

# Community: Supports Unique to AA

## *Community recreational venues*

- “...indoor basketball courts like somewhere where you don't got to pay.”
- “...the YMCA and the Boys and Girls Club keeps kids out of trouble and when they get older they will be more successful in the community, I think.”

## *Faith community*

- “My whole family goes - my sister, my mom. They always got something positive to say. When you are going down there, you have people that care about you, going to pray for you, too. It is somewhere you can go..”
- “Church helped me turn things around in what I am doing.”

# Community: Supports Unique to AA

## *Places to hang out*

- “I hang out in ghetto areas, places where people tend to hang out, and you know if you go there, there is going to be people you know. It is just a comfortable feeling. It is not like you actually have to know them, but you just feel like a connection.”

## *Advocacy and support organization*

- “That's why you don't see a lot of these youth that be hanging around on the corner, they would be here today. Most of our groups are people who used to hang around at the bus stop, and they're here today, and they had cleaned up their act.” “They accept everyone in the program, no age limit or criteria.”

# Work: Shared Barriers



## *Lack of economic resources*

- “Say you are in Section 8 housing then you get looked at differently...I have gone and applied for a job and this dude will get it and he has not other qualities but a little more money.”
- “It took me a lot to get a job because I didn’t have transportation to nowhere and I was way far out.”

# Work: Shared Barriers



## *Criminal background*

- “You can’t get a job because of your criminal background.”
- “Even if they find out you have only one offense you can’t even get a job at Fred Meyer’s [a regional variety store].”

## *Lack of education*

- “Not having anything behind you, like a high school diploma.”

# Work: Barriers Unique to EA

## *Lack of employer support*

- “I actually had to quit my last job, because it was so bad, because my boss was so unaccommodating. There has to be a medium ground. I would try to explain and she would be like, “Oh, can't help you.”
- “...there are times when there is so much pressure that you have to (self-disclose about mental illness) so they understand what is going on. That's when they don't want to hear it or they don't want to understand. They just want to assume you are having a bad day.”

## *Personal factors-Learning Disabilities*

- “If you can't read you can't really do most of the work. I can do it physically and mentally but when it comes down to reading things...”

# Work: Barriers Unique to AA

*Personal factors-pregnancy*

- “Having kids and not having child care.”

# Work: Shared Supports



## *Training opportunities*

- “My job, they put us through all these trainings, so that would be good for getting a child development license.”
- “They helped me get a job at a pet store. I did that for a couple of years. When I moved here I went and found a job. I work at Safeway.”

# Work: Supports Unique to EA

## *Work assistance*

- “They helped me get a job for a couple of months. I worked a couple of jobs. I was a janitor and I worked at a pet store for two years. They find me a job and then I work there. The job that comes, they don't pay me, but the people that got me the job, they pay me.”

## *Understanding supervisors*

- “My direct supervisor, who is a psychologist, knows I have PTSD, but we never bring it up. I just tell him I want to take a few hours off or a day off every once in a while, and he never asks or pressures.”

# Social Services: Barriers Unique to EA

## *Ineffective services*

- “I got my medication from my psychiatrist and I would see her twice a week, but I got absolutely nothing out of that. I've never really felt like they've helped me as much.”

## *Lack of commitment on the part of therapists and counselors*

- “Going to someone who's being paid to talk and listen and after a little while, you're like, ‘Are you really listening because you care like they said or are you sitting there because you want the money?’”

# Social Services: Barriers Unique to AA

## *Services not relevant*

- “Sometimes you just don't connect with some of that stuff. You are just not connected with it.”

## *Services not offered*

- “They never really, you know what I'm saying, worked with me. I never really asked for services.”

## *Violation of confidentiality*

- “All my business was exposed to the person who was taking care of me. It just brought me down to doing worse than what I was doing before I even got into counseling.”

# Social Services: Shared Supports

## *Helpful services*

- “He had good advice of how to calm myself down, give me some things called cognitive thinking skills that I started using. Yeah, he just gave me some tools, basically, some tools to use to calm myself down and get my mind straight and things like that.”
- [Speaking of case manager] “He helped me get my first job. He made it fun, you know. We would goof around. He was like a buddy. That is what makes it work.”

## *Caring staff who showed an interest*

- “He helped more because he let me make myself better. He didn’t try to force me...He would just hang out more like a friend.”

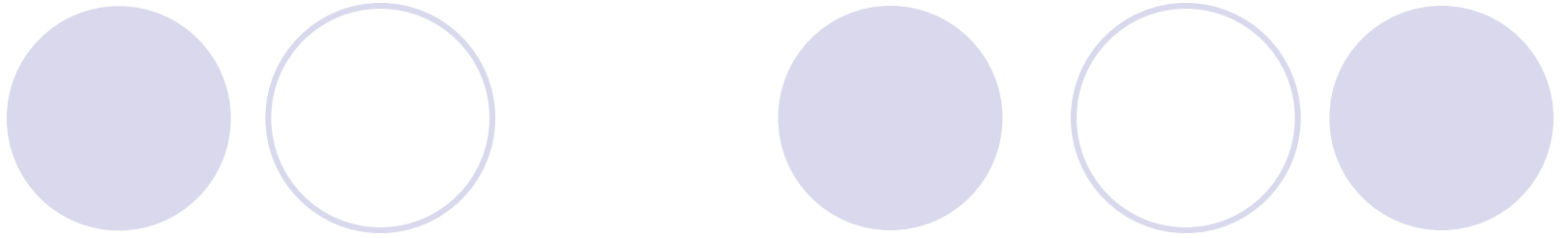
# Social Services: Supports Unique to AA

## *Services offered through alternative programs*

- “There are people that care,” and “Basically you have a whole support system right here. You have somebody to talk to you and you don't want to talk to no outsiders. You talk to people who already know our whole histories. We come right here, and we have us.”

## *Access to concrete services*

- “Use the computer or if I need to use a fax machine, I can come here. Just like that. If I need to fax a job something, I can come here and use it. I have access to that stuff.”



# Rion Tisino

age: 32

# **Limitations of the Study**

- Geographically limited sample
- We don't know how well our sample represents all European American or African American youths with mental health needs.
- Future research would benefit from greater ethnic diversity and longitudinal studies.

# Implications of the Study

- Although all study participants were referred by mental health providers or had self-identified as having been involved in the mental health system, half of the African American youths did not indicate they had a mental health diagnosis, which influences their ability to access and receive services.
- School is especially important in the lives of youth and youths with mental health needs, yet a pervasive lack of understanding of mental health issues persists, and creates challenges that get in the way of graduating.
- African American youths only identified alternative school programs as places where they experienced supportive staff; European American youths, in contrast, frequently mentioned supportive public school staff.

# Questions for the Audience

- Any questions about how the study was conducted?
- How do our findings reflect your experiences with community integration for transition-age youth?
- What kinds of solutions to the challenges of community integration are you aware of?
- Who needs this information?
- How do you suggest that we communicate our findings?

# Contact Information

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