



Process Summary for RSN's Curriculum Enhancement Project, Phase 1:

The Curriculum Enhancement Project commenced with a series of meetings in May 2023 between Jamie Jacobs (Director of Operations and Programs), Terence Johnson (Executive Director), Jeremy Smith (Participant Manager), and me (Kimberly Shoulars, Mentor) to discuss the goals and vision for RSN's Life Skills Groups. The existing curriculum focused on providing basic interpersonal skills for youth in recovery. RSN wanted to revise the curriculum from a reactive model to a preventative one that could apply to a broader audience.

In our meetings, we discussed the importance of creating a curriculum that emphasizes practical skills that are relevant to the life experiences of youth and emerging adults. The curriculum should also tie into RSN's Individual Skill Building Program Model to ensure wraparound support, cohesiveness, and consistency for one-on-one mentoring recipients. The Individual Skill Building Program Model helps "participants in goal recognition, setting, planning, and achievement in any, or all of the eight dimensions of wellness." Using the eight dimensions of wellness as the foundation for the curriculum enhancements would allow for a versatile, innovative, practical, and holistic Life Skills program.

My experiences working with other local youth-centered non-profits in various roles, including curriculum development, directly informed the content and approaches in phase 1 of the Curriculum Enhancement Project. Additionally, as a mentor and Life Skills Group facilitator for RSN, I drew on my experiences with the existing curriculum to guide conversations with other mentors/facilitators. I created an online survey for RSN's mentors/facilitators to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the existing curriculum. I also conducted phone interviews and virtual meetings starting in June 2023.

Concurrently, I worked with Jeremy to identify other stakeholders for this project: local youth-centered community organizations, educators, social workers, and participants. I developed a separate survey to identify common themes and trends and to gain actionable

insights from local youth-serving organizations identified as RSN's community partners. I sent survey invitations via email and YO: Durham in mid-June 2023.

The curriculum enhancements are based on the feedback from interviews, conversations, and surveys and in collaboration with the following sources:

- RSN mentors and Life Skills group facilitators:
 - Edward Scott
 - Pablo Robles
 - Jeremy Smith
 - Emily Branson
 - Shawn Baker
- RCP Life Skills Group participants
- Tiffany Banks, school counselor
- Durham Children's Initiative
- Boomerang
- Knox St. Studios
- The Bull City Woodshop

Additionally, I used the following research to supplement stakeholder feedback and as a guide for industry best practices:

- Childtrends.org (trending workplace readiness skills)
- Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation (sense of belonging, community engagement)

Key Findings

The following key findings reflect the most consistent feedback from stakeholders across categories and informed the development of the curriculum enhancements in phase 1:

- Interactivity/ experiential learning is crucial for community partner, mentor, participant, and facilitator buy-in. Demonstrating how the content is relevant through experiential activities will improve engagement and help participants understand real-life applications of the content and concepts.

- Participant input is essential (youth-centered vs. youth-led) for impact and outcomes. Facilitators and community partners welcome youth leadership in parts of the curriculum to ensure relevance and promote self-advocacy.
- Community partners welcome opportunities for more active roles in the life skills groups, including co-facilitating with RSN mentors based on areas of expertise. Increased community partner involvement improves program outreach and extends RSN's resources.
- Movement activities should be incorporated into weekly sessions to demonstrate how physical wellness improves learning outcomes and to promote movement as a stress management technique.
- Stress management techniques are fundamental to improving youth learning outcomes and overall quality of life. Unmanaged stress is a barrier to academic and personal success.
- Fostering trust by building relationships with participants creates a safe and effective learning environment. Building trust as a precursor to in-depth discussions of personal issues models healthy relationships and boundaries. The first couple of sessions should be dedicated to building relationships with participants.
- Sense of belonging and community: Providing a variety of activities and adaptable content will help facilitators deliver the curriculum in the most effective and impactful way for their group
- Emphasis on personal growth and purpose encourages self-discovery, goal exploration, and finding a sense of purpose. It helps participants develop a growth mindset, set meaningful goals, and understand their values to promote spiritual and intellectual wellness.
- Emotional intelligence: provides tools to recognize, understand, and manage emotions, promoting self-awareness and empathy for others

Click [here](#) for an overview of the enhanced curriculum.