

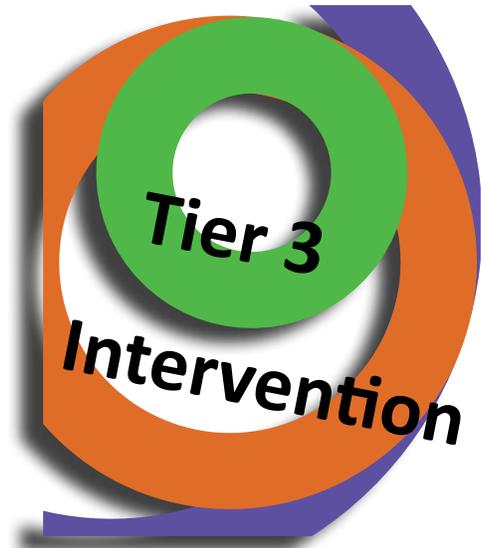
# Project RENEW

Tier 3

## Program Description, October, 2013.

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Project RENEW (Rehabilitation, Empowerment, Natural Supports, Education and Work), is a transition program and intervention for youth and young adults (ages 16-22) with severe emotional disturbance (SED) or serious mental illness (SMI). Project RENEW was designed to implement innovative and flexible strategies to increase employment skills and improve school completion rates for these at risk young people. Project RENEW was designed as an intensive intervention for students with SED or SMI within the positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) model to help the top 5 percent of at risk students (Malloy, J., Cheney, D., Hagner, D., Cormier, G. M., & Bernstein, S., 1998). RENEW is headquartered within the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire.



## What the Goals of Project RENEW?

Project RENEW is centered on four principles, four goals, and eight strategies. The four principles include self-determination, competency-based service, unconditional care, and natural supports and community inclusion. The four goals are high school completion, competitive employment, post secondary participation, and positive community inclusion. The eight strategies are personal futures planning, alternative education options, school-to-career options, naturally supported employment, individually developed teams, mentoring, and sustaining community connections (Malloy, J., Drake, J., & Couture, D., 2009)

## Organization

The Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire offers four levels of training for those agencies or schools interested in implementing Project RENEW. Level 1 is comprised of one 60 to 90 minute training session on the principles of the project and information about how schools and communities have implemented it already. Training level 2 is a 4-8 hour training session that offers experiential learning activities and an in-depth overview of the RENEW model's goals and strategies. Training levels 1 and 2 are more informational and are not adequate for implementation. Training level 3 includes a three day on-site training and monthly follow up conferences for the first three months after initial implementation, followed by a fidelity check 1 year later. Training level 4 includes four days of on-site training. The first three days are the same as the Level 3 training. The fourth day focuses on strategic planning for implement-

ing RENEW, as well as consultation on data collection and systems of management. The annual program costs of RENEW are approximately \$1000 - \$2000 per student. Initial funding for RENEW was provided as part of a grant. The Facilitator's Training Manual for project RENEW is available for purchase through the Institute on Disability Bookstore.

When a school decides it is interested in implementing project RENEW, training staff meet with the school or district decision makers to talk about staffing and contexts for RENEW implementation, and then, based upon the school's readiness to implement, they select the staff to be trained in RENEW. Typically schools select school counselors, social workers, psychologists who work directly with youth, alternative program teachers, and para-educators to be trained. The training is typically delivered by one of the RENEW training staff on site (many districts or states use school improvement, PBIS, special education, or other grant dollars for funding). Training staff also provide coaching support via telephone or internet. The project RENEW Readiness Checklist is used as a starting place for agencies and schools to evaluate needs and resources before implementation (Malloy, J., Drake, J., & Couture, D., 2009).

The facilitators are not compensated for providing RENEW. As part of the readiness process, training staff help the school look for staff who already spend time with youth who are struggling in school and ask them if they can provide RENEW in place of what they are doing now.

Replication FTE depends on how many youth each facilitator plans to work with. A facilitator, who is going to work with 2-3 youth, should expect to spend one day a week (6 hours per week) in the beginning and incrementally less over time. A full time facilitator can work with as many as 15 youth who are active in the process at one time.

## **Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)**

Project RENEW training staff are currently working with state-level PBIS networks in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Pennsylvania. Only those high schools that are implementing PBIS at the Universal level with fidelity are invited as pilot sites to implement RENEW in these locations. RENEW is currently working with 7 high schools in New Hampshire and they are in their 3rd year as PBIS sites. They are training 6-8 high schools at a time to begin implementation. RENEW trainers will also work with one school at a time if the school has the resources. RENEW coordinators have found that community members volunteer their time and are happy to do so to help the youth. Paid support/systems people (mental health providers, vocational rehabilitation, child welfare) function as team members as part of their current jobs.

### **Strategy 1: Personal futures planning**

The success of project RENEW depends heavily on the first strategy: personal futures planning. A RENEW facilitator works with students to create a meaningful, personalized, individualized plan using a technique referred to as "mapping." Each student's personal map should include the context of his or her current situation, with an increased understanding of past experiences, both those that were positive and those that were negative, identification of current resources and relationships that can be called upon for support, future goals, dreams, and wishes, possible challenges and obstacles, and finally a detailed action plan. The principle of self-determination is essential at this stage. RENEW facilitators work with the young person to revise the plan over time.

**Strategy 2: Alternative education options**

The second strategy is the use of alternative education options. Alternative education options can be as basic as using a computer-based program to earn class credit or readjusting a class schedule. More creative alternative options have been suggested, such as enrolling in vocational classes or gaining credit for a work-based internship. Depending on the student's situation and goals, more extreme options may be utilized; these include pursuing an adult education program or taking the GED.

**Strategy 3: School-to-career options**

The third strategy is to identify school-to-career options. Once a personal plan has been created to identify post-high school goals, RENEW facilitators create a framework to facilitate school and work-based learning experiences to help foster successful transition to adult life. School-based learning experiences may include participation in vocation classes and programs, independent study, classes in college, and community education classes. Work-based learning experiences may include internships, informational interviews, job-shadowing, paid work experiences, apprenticeships, on-the-job mentoring, and volunteer opportunities.

**Strategy 4: Naturally supported employment**

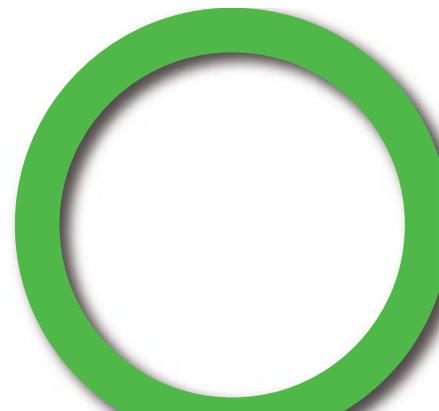
Naturally supported employment is the fourth strategy. Holding a job provides the opportunity to learn about earning and managing money, develop professional relationships and community connections, and to develop skills to promote future employment. The RENEW facilitator helps the student to use his or her "resource network" (relatives, friends, teachers) to find employment opportunities. The facilitator may also connect the student with state vocational rehabilitation agencies. The facilitator also works with the student to find and cultivate a mentor at the place of employment.

**Strategy 5: Individualized resource development**

The fifth strategy is individualized resource development. During the personal planning sessions in the first strategy, RENEW facilitators work with the student to develop a human resource list that includes his or her personal talents and capabilities, resources possessed by both immediate and extended families, such as what they do for work, their education, where they live, and other valuable assets. Social resources include other associations with neighbors, peers, teachers, coworkers, bosses, social workers, counselors, juvenile probation officers and others they value and trust. RENEW facilitators are aware of and direct students to institutional resources such as services and supports offered through schools, mental health clinics, and local vocational rehabilitation offices.

**Strategy 6: Individually developed teams**

The sixth strategy is individually developed teams. The development of each student's team is based on the needs of the student and not that of the system. Team members are added because they offer critical contributions to the student's success. The RENEW team is not the individualized education program (IEP) team. RENEW teams strive for inter-agency cooperation. Team members may come from special education, regular education, child welfare, juvenile justice, and other sources.



**Strategy 7: Mentoring**

Strategy seven is mentoring. Many students with EBD struggle to create and maintain relationships with older peers and adults. These relations are critical for individual development. The mentoring strategy of RENEW aims to pair students with mentors that help them make valuable new social connections, build social and career skills, and develop positive self-esteem. Mentoring relationships are based on mutual educational and career interests and are never coerced.

**Strategy 8: Creating sustainable community connections**

Strategy eight is creating sustainable community connections. When students graduate high school or “age out” of children service systems, most youth with EBD lose many if not all of the supports they depended on. A primary purpose of Project RENEW is to help these youth develop experiences in natural settings that will promote learning the social and work skills necessary for transitioning to adulthood while still receiving support from the service system. In addition, “the RENEW model aims to help community members to understand how ecological factors can be manipulated or changed in order to endure success and to support the youth” (Malloy, Drake, Abtate, Cormier, 2010, p.279).

**Results and Population**

Empirical research support for Project RENEW is still in the early stages. Current outcome data is limited to pre and post-intervention data; however, researchers are optimistic about the findings. The first RENEW cohort included 72 youth. Outcome data for this cohort demonstrated that participants graduated high school, entered post-secondary education, and obtained employment at rates much higher than that typical for youth with EBD (Malloy, J.M, Sundar, V., Hagner, D., Pierias, L. & Viet, T. 2010). Of these original 72 youths, all had a label of serious mental illness or serious emotional disturbance (the state Division of Behavioral Health criteria for community mental health center eligibility for children and youth). Project RENEW facilitators have observed that many students who are at risk for dropping out have experienced some form of trauma. Fifty-one participants were male, and 21 were female; all were Caucasian. Fifty-four of the participants carried a label of learning disabled on their IEP. In addition, 57 were living in foster placements, were “homeless” or otherwise not living with their parents. Twenty-seven had co-occurring substance abuse issues and 18 had been diagnosed with schizophrenia. Half of the participants were involved with the courts or had been involved with Division of Children, Youth and Families as Children in Need of Services or as wards of the state. Project RENEW has now been implemented in several states. Although originally designed for in New Hampshire, RENEW has been successfully implemented in more urban areas such Milwaukee and Detroit.

**Conclusion**

There is still a relatively small amount of research that has been done on this program. However, one study has shown promising results with 72 participants. This program is an intensive intervention designed to be implemented through the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support program to students with either severe mental illness or severe emotional disturbance. The program has eight strategies, four goals and four principles that it was designed around.



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[http://www.dropoutprevention.org/modelprograms/show\\_program.php?pid=214](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/modelprograms/show_program.php?pid=214)

**Recommended Citation:**

Parnell, K., & Peterson, R., (2013, October. *Project RENEW. Program Description*. Lincoln, NE: Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Department of Education.  
<http://k12engagement.unl.edu/project-renew>

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