

Bear Creek Academy - Case Assessment and Intervention Paper

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the case assessment and interventions for a fifteen-year-old student who attends Bear Creek Academy. Identifying information and the reason for intervention is identified. Then, the author discusses the assessment activities that were conducted as well as the student's long-term goals that were identified. The principles of the generalist model, theories, and human diversity issues that are involved in this case were outlined. The social worker also discussed the client's strengths and provided an overview of the client's termination process which consisted of the student transitioning back to his home public school system.

Keywords: alternative school, special education, Individualized Education Plan, goals, empowerment

Bear Creek Academy J.J. Case Assessment and Intervention Paper

J.J. is a 15-year-old White male who lives with his adoptive mother and father. J.J. was born prematurely at 35 weeks and experienced respiratory distress which resulted in him receiving oxygen in the NICU for 12 days. The client was adopted at two years old via local adoption. J.J. resides in Powhatan, Virginia with his family. J.J. is currently enrolled in the eighth grade at Bear Creek Academy, an alternative school in Cumberland, Virginia. He has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and receives special education services under the category of a student identified with a Specific Learning Disability and Other Health Impairment. Specifically, he receives instruction in a self-contained classroom and academic and testing accommodations.

Prior to being referred to Bear Creek Academy, the client attended Powhatan Public Schools. His teachers reported no significant behavioral concerns and stated that he was “kind, helpful, and eager to please”. His teachers enjoyed having him in class but noted that he did require additional academic support. In 2019, the client was charged with a crime and the IEP team deemed it unsafe for him to attend public school. The team made this determination based on his academic and emotional needs being beyond the scope of what the public school system could provide. Some of the accommodations that the IEP team believed that the student would benefit from are frequent breaks during instructional times, small classroom size, and differentiated curriculum and content. The IEP team noted that J.J. needs scaffolding on most academic assignments and Bear Creek Academy would be able to provide the student with the structure that he needs to be more successful.

The client has many strengths such as his desire to do well in school, his good manners, and the way he cares for others. J.J. can complete assignments with staff guidance but does require additional levels of support to access grade-level content. At times, the client's dysregulation and anxiety can get in the way of his success in the classroom. J.J. has improved his ability to retain knowledge from day to day and has worked hard with staff to organize his thoughts so he can stay more regulated during class time.

The assessment activities that were conducted in this case were an Individualized Education Plan review with Powhatan Public Schools which took place on June 2nd, 2021 to review the student's IEP that was originally written in May of 2019, and a Confidential Psychological Evaluation which was completed by Spectrum Transformation Group on February 1st, February 18th, and March 26th, 2021. Factors that were considered in these assessments include the student's school performance as well as his psychological, academic, social, communicative, and behavioral functioning. The social worker believes that the client's dysregulation, anxiety, medical diagnosis of ADHD (mixed), sense of inadequacy, and challenges with focus and attention are the most significant issues in regards to their impact on the client's functioning.

As previously noted, J.J. possessed many strengths when he first began attending school at Bear Creek Academy. Along with these strengths, the client also had areas that he, his family, and the staff at Bear Creek Academy wanted him to work on during his time at the school. One unique aspect of the character education program at Bear Creek Academy is the Personal Empowerment Program (PEP) (Personal Empowerment Program, 2008). The Personal Empowerment Program helps students to internalize positive behaviors and build self-worth

(PEP, 2008). Throughout their time at Bear Creek Academy, students have the opportunity to earn up to nine patches which represent important milestones in their personal growth (PEP, 2008). Students can earn patches by following school rules and accomplishing personal goals. The students establish personal goals during their first week at school and create new goals once they have achieved their original goals. This process continues until the student acquires all their patches, transitions back to the public school system, or graduates from Bear Creek Academy. J.J. responded well to this program and has been presented with five of the nine patches in the PEP program.

Due to J.J. being at Bear Creek Academy since 2019, he has created and achieved many goals in his time at the school. For the purpose of this paper, the social worker met with a teacher that has been working with J.J. since his arrival at the school to discuss some of the long-term goals that were established for the student. The first goal was related to his writing ability and neatness. When he arrived at Bear Creek Academy, J.J. struggled significantly with handwriting and organizing his writing. His teacher worked with him on writing each letter of the alphabet neatly on wide-lined writing paper. After working on this for some time, they progressed to focus on improving his spelling and overall neatness when working on more advanced assignments such as writing five-paragraph essays. The client's next goal was related to reading. When he first started at Bear Creek Academy, J.J. struggled with reading comprehension and retelling stories. He and his teacher worked to strengthen his comprehension skills through lots of reading practice independently and with peers. He is now able to read stories that are on his grade level and have improved greatly in his reading comprehension skills. His teacher would like to see him continue to work on improving his confidence when reading out loud. His last long-term goal is

in regards to his focus and organization. This is an area that J.J. continues to struggle with and will likely need continued assistance with as he finishes up his time at Bear Creek Academy, as well as after he transitions back into the public school system.

The generalist practice model works to solve problems at varying levels of intervention through the social worker's progression through a series of planned steps (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018). This model recognizes that problems may arise on a community, organizational, group, family, or individual level and approaches these problems through micro interventions (working with individuals), mezzo interventions (working with small groups), and macro interventions (working with large systems) (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018). The seven steps to the generalist intervention model are engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, termination, follow-up, and reassess or discontinue contact (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018). In the case of J.J., the social worker has moved through the engagement, assessment, and planning phases and is currently finishing off the implementation phase to move on to termination (transition back to the public school system) and follow-up.

There are three primary principles of generalist practice which include empowerment, advocacy, and human diversity, all of which were involved in this case (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018). Empowerment was achieved in this case through the implementation of strategies to increase the client's self-determination (right and ability to make his own decisions), consistent discussions about resilience during class time and therapeutic sessions (both the value of resilience and how the client has been resilient during his life), and by utilizing the strengths perspective throughout this case intervention. Advocacy is involved in how the staff at Bear Creek Academy teach the students to advocate for their own rights, needs, and abilities, rather

than depending on someone else to do so. Human diversity has been recognized throughout this case through the understanding that “human experiences shape the formation of identity” (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018). The staff at Bear Creek Academy recognize that each student comes from a unique background and has faced different challenges and overcome various obstacles to get to where they are right now. The students are taught that there is value in their story and that the unique experiences that they have had during their lifetime are what makes them the person that they are.

Although this case did not involve any social or policy issues, it did relate to a variety of theories, most clearly the Empowerment theory. The Empowerment Theory is frequently considered and utilized by teachers and counselors at Bear Creek Academy and was especially beneficial when assessing and intervening with J.J.. Empowerment theory helps clients to regain a sense of control and power within their lives through the use of various intervention methods (Empowerment theory in social work, 2021). This theory focuses on how oppression contributes to feelings of helplessness and works to improve the lives of marginalized clients on micro, mezzo, and macro levels through increasing the interpersonal, political, and individual power of oppressed individuals (Empowerment theory in social work, 2021).

One key aspect of the Empowerment theory that is central to the work done at Bear Creek Academy is a push to increase the self-efficiency of the students. In the context of the Empowerment theory, self-efficiency relates to an individual's ability to increase their personal power through the belief that the client can change their circumstances, which in turn, will change their outcomes (Empowerment theory in social work, 2021). The teachers and counselors at Bear Creek Academy work to improve the self-efficiency of students through open discussions

regarding power during which students have the opportunity to discuss areas within their life where they hold power as well as areas in which they feel oppressed. Both the teachers and counselors frequently encourage the students to explore their personal beliefs, perspectives, strengths, areas of growth, and challenge them to consider how their life experiences have both shaped and have been shaped by these factors. They also work with students daily to develop a variety of coping skills that help them work through problems by empowering them to believe that they are capable of changing and overcoming challenging situations in their life. In this case specifically, primarily micro-level interventions such as therapy and case management were used to help the client to recognize his own strengths and empower him to advocate for his needs (rather than depend on others to advocate for him). Specific therapeutic techniques that were utilized in this case included strategies to increase the client's self-worth, modeling of appropriate behaviors, helping the client to identify and avoid negative thought patterns, and consistent positive reinforcement for favorable behaviors.

The strengths perspective was frequently considered and utilized throughout this case. The staff at Bear Creek Academy consistently evaluate and make students aware of their academic, social, emotional, and behavioral strengths while also encouraging students to further develop skills in their weaker areas. Students come to Bear Creek Academy because they were not able to succeed or thrive within a less-restrictive, public school setting. For this reason, many of the students who attend school at Bear Creek Academy struggle significantly in at least one of the previously mentioned areas. While it can be easy to write these students off as “challenging” or “bad kids”, (many of them having been weighed down by these labels for most of their lives) the teachers and counselors at Bear Creek Academy understand that many (if not all) of the

student's negative behaviors are deeply rooted in trauma and pain that oftentimes was outside of the client's control. They utilize a strengths perspective to empower students to release the mindset that so many of them have been taught which is that they are troubled kids who are broken beyond repair. Once the client can escape from that toxic self-belief, the real work of improving their academic, social, emotional, and behavioral skills can begin.

Issues of human diversity related to this case are primarily involved with the client's below-average ability level in the areas of academic, psychological, communicative, social, and behavioral functioning. As with most human diversity issues, the client's entire life has been impacted by these differences in ability. When compared to other children his age, J.J. is functioning at a lower level in many areas. His levels of functioning are directly correlated to his referral to Bear Creek Academy as well as with his past struggle to thrive within a traditional school setting. After receiving an alternative and therapeutic-centered education at Bear Creek Academy since 2019, the client has made many improvements in these areas. The social worker believes that these improvements have occurred as a result of interventions that have been facilitated by the teachers and counselors at Bear Creek Academy such as small class sizes, frequent breaks during instructional times, weekly counseling sessions with a therapeutic advocate that the client trusts, clear and consistent exceptions from staff and daily empowerment through affirmations, rewards, and positive feedback.

The social worker believes that the interventions that have been utilized when working with this student have been effective in improving the student's overall functioning and meeting the original and ongoing goals that the client, his parents, and the staff at Bear Creek Academy developed initially and over the course of him attending the school. The ultimate goal of all

parties involved is for J.J. to be able to succeed and thrive within the least restrictive environment possible. Although Bear Creek Academy provides needed services for many students, the hope is that students will one day be able to return to the public school system. For students with more significant needs, returning to the public school system may not be a realistic goal, but the social worker and staff at Bear Creek Academy believe that this client is ready to transition back to attending public school in his home district. The capability of this student to return to a less restrictive setting after being at Bear Creek Academy for two years points to the hard work and resilience of the student, as well as highlights the effectiveness of the interventions conducted by the teachers and counselors at the school.

At Bear Creek Academy, termination of services either means that the student is approaching graduation from the school, or will be transitioning back into the public school system. In the case of J.J., the student will soon begin the gradual process of transitioning back to public school, in his case, Powhatan High School. The transition process will officially begin next fall with an IEP meeting to review the student's needs and discuss any changes that need to be made to his plan. During this meeting, those in attendance (the client's parents, at least one representative from Bear Creek Academy, and at least one representative from Powhatan Public Schools), will discuss the client's gradual "step down" process from Bear Creek Academy to the public school system. J.J. will likely begin by attending two classes at Bear Creek Academy and two classes at Powhatan High School each day. Because this student needs a fair amount of support in his main academic classes, the classes that he attends in the public school will initially be elective or vocational classes that are of interest to the student. This part-time schedule will benefit the student as he transitions back to a less restrictive environment (the public school

system) and will allow the student to be involved in extracurricular activities such as clubs and sports which this student has a lot of interest in. Throughout the transition process, the staff at Bear Creek Academy, Powhatan Public Schools, and J.J.'s family will work together as a team to make accommodations based on the student's needs and goals. Once J.J. has transitioned to fully attending school through Powhatan Public Schools, he will be terminated as a client of Bear Creek Academy. After termination, there will be little to no follow-up with the client by Bear Creek Academy. Typically, the school does not get re-involved in a case unless the client returns to Bear Creek Academy or a representative from the public school requests services from Bear Creek Academy on a case-by-case basis.

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