

Capabilities for living well: Life skills and knowledge in Youth AOD settings

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Introduction *Young people learn a range of skills and knowledges during AOD treatment, most of which are focused on cognitive strategies to reduce substance use (eg, identifying 'intentions', managing emotional responses). In this paper, we map the other skills learned in treatment settings, namely those focused on how to live 'normal' lives. While these skills are necessary to manage substance use, they are largely undervalued in a treatment system focused on a diagnose and treat model of delivery.*

Method: *We use longitudinal qualitative interview data collected from 38 young people aged 16-24 years old in NSW and Victoria, Australia. Interviews were conducted at baseline while participants were in residential treatment and then again at six and twelve months.*

Key Findings *Participants talked about the value of routine in managing their substance use. Routine was achieved through a particular set of skills learned during treatment: skills about work and hobbies (as distraction, to address boredom and build opportunities), housekeeping (cooking and money), and relationship management (with intimate partners, friends and families). Our analysis reveals that these skills not only assist in managing substance use but are part of building new social capabilities – relationships that are trusting and reliable, and new identities as worthy and resourceful – and in this way contribute to learnings that go far beyond managing substance use.*

Discussions and Conclusions *When Youth AOD promote life skills learning together with cognitive strategies, they set up young clients with the tools to manage their substance use but also the skills for living well.*

Implications for policy and practice *Moving away from a diagnose and treat model of delivery means more attention and resources must be given to the broader range of work that Youth AOD delivers, including life skills development.*

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