

# THE FUTURE OF EXECUTIVE-SKILLS COACHING AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE IN PROGRAMS THAT SERVE TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

## Lessons from the Annie E. Casey Pilot Project

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### CONTENTS

Overview	1
Part I: Background and Theory	5
The Four Components of the Executive-Skills Coaching Model	5
The Added Value of Using Behavioral Science to Design Environmental Modifications	12
Part II: The Implementation Experience	16
Training and Support for Coaches	18
Adaptations of the Model	19
Participants' Experiences	25
Next Steps	28
References	30
Acknowledgments	32

### LIST OF EXHIBITS

Table	
1 Overview of Executive-Skills Coaching	9
2 Program Descriptions	18
3 Summary of Executive Skills Across All Participants	21
4 A Selection of SMART Goal Statements Created During Coaching	23
Figure	
1 Roadmap Worksheet	15
2 Daily Goal-Setting Worksheet	17
3 Implementing the Executive-Skills Coaching Model at New Moms and Teen Parent Connection	20

### OVERVIEW

Executive skills are the cognitive abilities that make it possible for people to set goals, regulate impulses, and complete the steps necessary to achieve their objectives. Examples of these skills include time management, emotional control, and organization. Richard Guare and Peggy Dawson have developed a coaching strategy based on executive functioning, and three programs serving young people conducted a pilot of that strategy with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Executive-skills coaching (ESC) puts participant-driven goal setting at the center of the coaching interaction. Participants gain an understanding of their executive skills profiles and use the coaching sessions to define goals and monitor progress. The grantees involved in the pilot project were:

- New Moms, a job-training, housing, and family-support program in Chicago
- Teen Parent Connection (TPC), a support network for pregnant or parenting teens in state custody in the metropolitan Atlanta area
- Women's Resource Center, a program offering various career and educational services to single mothers in Grand Rapids, Michigan who are involved in the criminal justice system

This was the most diverse group of programs that had ever tested the Guare and Dawson ESC approach. MDRC's Center for Applied Behavioral Science (CABS) provided technical assistance to the grantees to help them use behavioral science to design "environmental modifications": strategies to reduce the demands on attention, organization, and follow-through that programs may unwittingly place on participants.

This report summarizes how programs implemented ESC, with an emphasis on how they adapted the coaching model to fit their program contexts, the challenges coaches faced, and the diverse

experiences of participants. Overall, the grantees described the pilot project as a positive experience — and in many cases a transformative one. Coaches found that ESC helped them to approach their practice more systematically and to clarify their role. They believed it empowered participants in a way that traditional case management does not. While there are limits to ESC and a critical need to define the organizational factors that contribute to successful implementation, the pilot seems to indicate that the model has promise. The final section of the report suggests next steps for researchers, technical-assistance providers, and funders to further support the refinement and spread of ESC in programs that serve at-risk young people.

Executive-skills coaching (ESC) offers a promising new way to reach at-risk teens and young adults who are simultaneously navigating the transition to adulthood and trying to get their lives back on track. The approach aims to empower young people to achieve goals related to self-sufficiency, parenting, interpersonal relationships, and other important areas that they choose. In the process, ESC coaches deliver support while being careful not to dominate their interactions with participants.

Executive skills are the cognitive abilities that make it possible for people to set goals, regulate impulses, and complete the many intermediary steps necessary to achieve their objectives. They are crucial to sound decision making and effective action. Executive skills are largely absent at birth and develop throughout childhood and young adulthood, finally stabilizing in the middle to late 20s. At that point, each person has a unique profile of executive skill strengths and weaknesses. ESC does not attempt to teach executive skills that the participant struggles with. Instead, it seeks to increase the participant's awareness of her executive-skills profile, to increase the likelihood that she will choose goals that align with her strengths and make explicit accommodations for her weaknesses. ESC is distinct from other person-centered coaching methods that put the participant in the driver's seat in the counseling interaction because of its reliance on the theory of executive functioning. The executive-skills profile is the foundation of the coaching approach, which includes the three additional components of goal setting, environmental modifications, and incentives.

For eight months starting in June 2016, three organizations received support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to conduct a pilot of the ESC model developed by Richard Guare and Peg Dawson.<sup>1</sup> Midway through implementation, the grantees received additional technical assistance from MDRC's Center for Applied Behavioral Science (CABS) to design environmental modifications — programmatic changes to support the goals of ESC that draw on evidence from behavioral science. The programs involved in the pilot project were:

- New Moms, a job-training, housing, and family-support program in Chicago
- Teen Parent Connection (TPC), a support network for pregnant or parenting teens in state custody in the metropolitan Atlanta area

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<sup>1</sup> Dawson and Guare (2009).

- Women’s Resource Center, a program offering various career and educational services to single mothers in Grand Rapids, Michigan who are involved in the criminal justice system

This pilot was the first time this ESC approach was implemented in a diverse set of programs that serve at-risk young women. While the pilot was under way, Guare further refined the model, partly based on insights emerging from the pilot sites. The version of the ESC model described in this paper is the one that includes those refinements; the paper describes the earlier guidance coaches received when relevant.

This report reviews the ESC model and proposes ways that behavioral science can be used to design environmental modifications. It describes how New Moms and TPC implemented the model, emphasizing the ways they adapted the four program components to fit their contexts and on the stories of coaches and participants. The primary sources of data are interviews with managers and coaches, and spreadsheets that tracked participants’ goals anonymously. The report concludes with recommendations about how to improve the delivery of ESC in organizations serving young people.

We cannot draw conclusions about ESC’s effectiveness based on the pilot project.<sup>2</sup> The pilot was limited in duration, involved a small number of participants, and did not include support for ongoing training or formal data collection. Nevertheless, it generated lessons that are instructive to the field as it considers the future of ESC in organizations that serve at-risk teens and young adults.

The young women served by the programs involved faced multiple, serious life challenges. Most were single parents, and many had had contact with the criminal justice or child welfare system. They had low levels of education, high incidences of abuse, and weak support from their families. They ranged in age from 14 to 24, putting them at different stages in the development of their executive skills. Despite these complexities, all of the grantees reported that the pilot project was a positive experience and in many cases a transformative one. Coaches found that ESC helped them to approach their practice more systematically and to clarify their role. They believed it empowered participants in a way that traditional case management does not. While there are limits to ESC and a critical need to define

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<sup>2</sup> A randomized controlled evaluation of the Guare-Dawson ESC approach is under way. The project is called MyGoals and the evaluator is MDRC. MyGoals targets adult job seekers who have housing subsidies in Baltimore and Houston. The goals of the demonstration are to increase employment, improve career advancement, and reduce poverty.

the organizational factors that contribute to successful implementation, the pilot seems to indicate that the model has promise.

This report is divided into two sections. The first provides a general introduction to the theory of ESC and the application of behavioral science to coaching practice. The second describes two of the programs that implemented ESC in detail, and summarizes lessons for the field.

## **BACKGROUND AND THEORY**

### **The Four Components of the Executive-Skills Coaching Model**

The ESC approach consists of four highly integrated components: executive-skills assessment, goal setting, environmental modifications, and incentives. Envisioned as a counseling approach that occurs one-on-one over the course of several meetings, ESC begins with two assessments: the Executive Skills Questionnaire to obtain an executive-skills profile, and the Getting to Know You Questionnaire to build rapport with the participant and begin to explore goals. Following those questionnaires, the coach helps the participant identify a long-term goal and determines whether it is a “good fit.” Doing so involves investigating whether there are “deal-breakers” in the participant’s history (for example, a criminal record that bars her from certain occupations) and whether the participant’s strengths (for example, child care, transportation, and executive skills) align with the anticipated demands of meeting that goal.

Once the participant has settled on a long-term goal, she works with the coach to identify the prerequisites that must be put in place and the milestones she must reach to achieve it. For example, a participant whose long-term goal is to enroll in a training program may have milestones related to choosing a training provider and applying for financial aid. Milestones are then broken down into even more immediate “SMART” goals and action plans. A SMART goal must have the attributes of being Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Realistic, and Timely. It is the goal that must be achieved within two weeks to a month if the participant is to continue to progress toward the long-term goal, while the action plan is what will be done within the coming week or so. The coaching interaction involves cycles of setting goals, checking in on goals, rewarding progress with incentives, and reflecting on failure to determine whether there are factors external to the participant that can be modified to increase the chance of success, or whether the goal itself should be modified. Each of these program components is described in greater detail next.

### *Executive-Skills Assessment*

Guare and Dawson define 12 executive skills that contribute to goal setting and goal attainment. These are:

- Response inhibition<sup>3</sup>
- Emotional control
- Sustained attention
- Organization
- Flexibility
- Goal-directed persistence
- Working memory<sup>4</sup>
- Task initiation
- Planning/priority setting
- Time management
- Metacognition<sup>5</sup>
- Stress tolerance

We tend to gravitate toward the tasks that take advantage of our strengths and away from those that highlight our weaknesses, but executive-skills profiles do not stabilize until around 30 years of age. The brain continues to develop throughout a person's 20s, and executive-control functions are the last to be acquired. As young adults confront the challenges of early adulthood such as managing money or searching for jobs — and in the case of many of the young women served by the

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<sup>3</sup> Response inhibition is the ability to think before you act, which gives you time to evaluate a situation and how your behavior might affect it.

<sup>4</sup> Working memory is the ability to hold information in your mind while working on a complex task. It incorporates the ability to draw on past learning or experience and apply it to the situation at hand, and the ability to project into the future.

<sup>5</sup> Metacognition is the ability to observe yourself and evaluate how you solve problems. It includes the ability to monitor and evaluate yourself.

pilot programs, parenting — they practice their executive skills. Young people routinely seek guidance from older adults who “lend” them their executive skills and experience.<sup>6</sup> Coaches can play this role by “giving the young person opportunities to learn and practice these skills with support which will be gradually faded.”<sup>7</sup>

In addition to being under 30, the participants in this pilot project live in poverty, often with unstable housing and other life challenges. When people live in stressful, impoverished conditions, their executive skills are constantly under strain. The environment imposes a tax on their executive functioning that makes it difficult to overcome challenges successfully. Research from the emerging field of the psychology of scarcity shows that people who do not have enough money, time, sleep, or social support have less capacity for self-regulation and delayed gratification.<sup>8</sup> As one paper describes it:

The person becomes locked in the present and has more difficulty with keeping more distant goals in mind, creating strategies for how they will achieve their goals, inhibiting the negative feelings associated with denying or ignoring immediate needs; and being able to seek creative ways around the obstacles that arise as they try to achieve their goals.<sup>9</sup>

Coaching that “scaffolds” — supplements — a person’s own executive control may be particularly useful in this context.

The first step in the ESC model is to obtain a profile of each participant’s executive skills using an Executive Skills Questionnaire developed by Guare and Dawson. The questionnaire consists of 36 items scored on a six-point Likert scale, grouped by skill.<sup>10</sup> For example, the following questions produce a global score for *emotional control*:

- 1 I do what I am supposed to do, even if I get frustrated.
- 2 I keep my cool, even if my feelings are hurt.
- 3 I hold onto my temper.

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<sup>6</sup> Guare, Dawson, and Guare (2017).

<sup>7</sup> Guare, Dawson, and Guare (2017).

<sup>8</sup> Mullainathan and Shafir (2013).

<sup>9</sup> Riccio and Wiseman (2016).

<sup>10</sup> A Likert scale asks respondents to rate how much they agree or disagree with a series of statements.

Coaches tabulate the number of points within each skill, and classify the skills with the highest scores as the participant's "top skills" and those with the lowest as their "weak skills." As long as participants rate themselves higher on some items than others, the questionnaire will yield a meaningful profile. Coaches also complete the questionnaire and are encouraged to share their profiles with participants to normalize the procedure and demonstrate the benefits of greater self-understanding. In addition to the questionnaire, coaches administer a Getting to Know You Questionnaire during the initial meeting. These questions help build rapport by focusing on a participant's preferences, skills, personality, and goals for the future.

### ***Goal Setting***

At the heart of the coaching interaction is *participant*-driven goal setting. This practice is a radical departure from traditional case management, which assumes the expertise of the case manager in laying out an action or remediation plan for the participant. ESC is similar to motivational interviewing in that participants are assumed to be experts in their own lives, and the coaching process is meant to uncover and activate their ability to make positive changes in their behavior. In fact, Guare and Dawson describe training in motivational interviewing as a necessary prerequisite for ESC.<sup>11</sup>

The coach and participant determine the participant's long-term goals together, assess the suitability of each one, and make concrete plans to achieve them. In the time since the pilot project launched, Guare has provided more detail on the steps in the coaching process, as shown in Table 1. Coaches in the pilot programs were trained in the core ideas of letting participants steer the interaction, creating SMART goals, breaking big goals into smaller steps, and engaging in cognitive rehearsal (that is, talking through with participants how they plan to accomplish each step). However, they did not receive the structured framework shown in the table.

### ***Environmental Modifications***

Environmental modifications can be defined narrowly or broadly. The narrow definition refers to strategies that coaches and participants discuss during action planning (Step 9 in Table 1) that are extrinsic to the participant and increase the

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<sup>11</sup> Guare explained the compatibility between motivational interviewing and ESC with reference to DiClemente et al.'s stages of behavior change (1991). Motivational interviewing is effective in moving people from the "precontemplation" to the "contemplation" stage. In precontemplation, a person has no intention of changing his or her behavior, because he or she does not see the necessity. Motivational interviewing uses specific conversational techniques to provide information and raise doubts about the person's choice. These techniques can lead to contemplation, the first step on the path to change. Once people reach this step, motivational interviewing can give way to ESC, which provides a concrete strategy to move people from contemplation to completed action (conversation with Richard Guare, 7/18/17).



Table 1

## Overview of Executive-Skills Coaching

Step	Objective
1. Conduct an initial interview and complete the Executive Skills Questionnaire and Getting To Know You Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Collect background information to inform the goodness-of-fit assessment (Step 3), and determine a person's three top and three weakest executive skills</li> <li>■ Build rapport</li> </ul>
2. Identify a tentative long-term goal and assess prerequisites for pursuing that goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identify a tentative long-term goal and the preliminary steps to achieve it</li> <li>■ Identify the specific actions the participant needs to take to accomplish those steps</li> <li>■ Identify the conditions (prerequisites) that must be met for the participant to complete these actions successfully, for example: housing, child care, transportation, schooling or training, tuition or funding, or executive skills</li> </ul>
3. Determine "goodness of fit"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Determine the degree to which there is a match between the participant's current skills, capabilities, and sources of support, and those needed to attain the goal</li> <li>■ Identify whether the prerequisites are in place to make the identified tentative long-term goal attainable</li> </ul>
4. Identify any potential obstacles that are significant enough to be "deal-breakers"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Discuss potential obstacles with the participant, for example: insufficient support, learning challenges, a criminal history, a record of drug or alcohol use, or issues of mental health or physical health</li> </ul>
5. Revise or firm up the long-term goal based on the results from Steps 2-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Based on the information gathered in Steps 2-4, confirm that the long-term goal articulated in Step 1 can be pursued</li> <li>■ If the long-term goal cannot be pursued due to an identified obstacle for which there is no apparent work-around, begin the goal-setting process again</li> <li>■ Aim to choose a goal that is related to the original goal and that fits the participant's preferences</li> </ul>
6. Discuss and list the prerequisites and milestones to be accomplished to reach the long-term goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Review the prerequisites for the goal identified in Step 2 and record them</li> <li>■ Discuss the milestones necessary to reach the goal</li> <li>■ Write down the first milestone</li> </ul>

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Step	Objective
7. Develop SMART goals for either prerequisites or milestones, beginning where the participant currently is, over a maximum of two to four weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have participant develop a SMART goal for the first milestone. SMART stands for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Specific</li> <li>■ Measurable</li> <li>■ Attainable</li> <li>■ ealistic and Relevant</li> <li>■ Timely</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ If possible, have the participant share her SMART goal with someone else in addition to her coach, to help ensure her success in achieving it</li> </ul>
8. Break down the SMART goal into action plans (over one week or less) and establish how the coach and the participant will check in on progress, how often, and when, and who will initiate these check-ins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop either daily or weekly action plans</li> <li>■ Once a satisfactory SMART goal has been developed, ask the participant a series of questions designed to help her designate the sequence of actions she will take to accomplish it</li> </ul>
9. Techniques to enhance success: environmental modifications, incentives and cognitive rehearsal strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Discuss with the participant whether there is an incentive to help her complete her action plans (an incentive that could be offered by the program or based on the participant’s preferred activities)</li> <li>■ Discuss with the participant potential environmental modifications, explaining how changing the situation surrounding a task can make it easier to complete that task, and presenting types of changes the participant could consider, with specific examples</li> <li>■ Rehearse the participant successfully completing the goal</li> </ul>
10. Review and assess action plan progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ If the action plan has been successfully completed, make a new action plan</li> <li>■ If not, evaluate why, and revise the SMART goal</li> <li>■ If the participant is repeatedly unsuccessful, return to motivational interviewing (a prerequisite for ESC)</li> </ul>
11. Gradually end coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The “fading” process — gradually ending coaching — begins when the participant is able to generate and carry out the next step on her own, with only check-ins or cues from the coach</li> <li>■ Increase the time between coaching sessions</li> <li>■ Decrease the prompts and resources provided by the coach</li> <li>■ Have the participant move ahead on her own by taking the lead in planning and implementing the actions needed to meet SMART goals</li> </ul>

chance that a SMART goal will be achieved. This narrow definition is the primary meaning of “environmental modifications” in the ESC model. When the participant and coach have settled on a specific plan, they discuss obstacles the participant is likely to face in completing it. Environmental modifications are ways to change the situation or the task itself to make it easier to complete in light of predictable challenges. There are three types of modifications under this narrow definition:

- 1 Changing the physical or social environment (for example, going to the library to study because home is too loud)
- 2 Modifying the task so it demands less of a weak skill (for example, if the participant has difficulty initiating tasks, scheduling a reminder call or a meeting directly after the first step)
- 3 Enlisting help from family or friends to manage the task (for example, asking one’s sister to hold one’s phone so one is not distracted while completing school enrollment forms)

These strategies are compatible with other psychological research that emphasizes changing the situation — not demanding more self-control from a person — as the way to help someone achieve a goal.<sup>12</sup>

The broad definition of “environmental modifications” refers to program-level changes that aim to reduce the demands on executive control associated with participating in the program. Environmental modifications may be intended to address a particular challenge with executive functioning that a group of participants faces. For example, if many participants have trouble with emotional regulation, the program may implement daily mindfulness exercises. Guare gave the example of working in a high school in which special education students had persistent problems getting to school on time. In response, he proposed and the school adopted flexible start times for special education students. More generally, program-level environmental modifications can be based on the general understanding that everyone has trouble with some executive skills, so all programs could improve participants’ engagement by removing sources of complexity and hassle that often go unrecognized.

Whereas goal setting is a “demand-side” intervention that assumes individuals can effect positive change in their lives through their own efforts, programmatic environmental modifications operate on the “supply side” of the institutions with

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<sup>12</sup> Duckworth (2016).

which they interact. Individuals who struggle with executive control are likely to benefit much more when institutions not only help them set their own goals but also agree to “create more slack” (that is, be more tolerant of their errors) and design interventions to provide external support for weak executive skills. This definition of environmental modifications is closely aligned with work in behavioral science. That is why researchers from MDRC’s Center for Applied Behavioral Science became involved in the pilot project. CABS uses tools from behavioral science to identify points where the program puts excessive pressure on attention, organization, and self-control, or where it is misaligned with human psychology in some other way. CABS then proposes evidence-based modifications to the program that might mitigate or eliminate these issues. The CABS framework is described below in the section on insights from behavioral science.

### *Incentives*

Incentives are used to make it more immediately rewarding to complete tasks and to help participants persevere as they pursue long-term goals. When a participant completes a difficult task related to a SMART goal, the coach should provide a reward or encourage the participant to choose an incentive such as a favorite television show or snack to reward herself. Incentives should be explicitly discussed in coaching sessions and scheduled (Step 9).

## **The Added Value of Using Behavioral Science to Design Environmental Modifications**

The field of behavioral science draws on evidence from behavioral economics, psychology, and marketing to provide a better understanding of decision making. The field is premised on two core insights:

- 1** People are not strictly rational in their decision making, but instead are prone to predictable errors related to paying attention, choosing among several options, and planning or following through on intentions.
- 2** The context strongly determines what people do.

The first insight opens the door for collaboration between behavioral science and other methods of inducing change that are based on realistic representations of human behavior — such as ESC. Behavioral scientists recognize that every observable behavioral outcome is made up of a series of small, intermediary steps. For example, the action of submitting a housing application is preceded by a number of decisions and actions including: wanting to find a new home, researching options, weighing available options and making a choice, getting an application, preparing documents, and completing the application. Each step is a new opportunity for a

person to fall off course due to issues like procrastination or cognitive overload. Like in ESC, where SMART goals are broken down into smaller action plans, behavioral scientists encourage *programs* to support each step in an implementation plan by, for example, designing reminders and checklists, or more radically, by introducing default enrollments or streamlined procedures.

This is where the second core insight comes into play. Studies in social psychology, behavioral economics, and marketing have repeatedly demonstrated that what people do is strongly shaped by context. Situational factors such as when interventions are delivered, how information is organized, the perceived behavior of others, and the frequency of reminders can influence what people do. Program operators can use this knowledge to increase engagement.

CABS used an abbreviated version of a process called behavioral diagnosis and design to develop environmental modifications for grantees.<sup>13</sup> Researchers interviewed administrators and coaches over the phone about challenges they encountered while implementing the coaching approach, and collected the documents they were using. Staff members described needing help with three main issues: (1) improving the forms used to track participants' goals and creating a dynamic display that showed progress over time, (2) increasing overall program engagement and attendance at coaching sessions, and (3) coordinating with other case workers who interacted with their participants or had control over them. CABS provided advice about environmental modifications targeting all three areas, but the second issue became the main focus because it was present in all three grantees.

CABS created new forms for each program using design principles that were informed by behavioral science.

■ **Increasing understanding by simplifying goals and putting them in context.**

Research has found that people are less able to understand choices and make decisions to enhance their own welfare when they are confronted with complex information.<sup>14</sup> Studies using insights from behavioral science have investigated

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<sup>13</sup> Behavioral diagnosis and design is a method used to identify potential obstacles to reaching desirable outcomes in human services programs — known as “bottlenecks.” The process consists of five phases: *define*, where CABS identifies a problem of interest within a program or agency; *diagnose*, where CABS gathers data, creates a process map, identifies drop-off points, and hypothesizes about bottlenecks; *design*, where CABS brainstorms and designs interventions informed by behavioral science that have the potential to address bottlenecks; *test*, where the interventions are tested using random assignment or other experimental methods; and *iterate*, where the cycle is repeated and refined multiple times. Only the first three phases were used in this pilot. For a more detailed description of behavioral diagnosis and design, see Richburg-Hayes et al. (2014).

<sup>14</sup> Iyengar and Lepper (2000); Bhargava and Manoli (2015).

ways to simplify the presentation of information by creating a clear and noticeable call to action and by reducing the number of choices presented. This research suggests that coaches implementing ESC should help participants to identify a small number of long-term goals. It can be challenging to identify only a few goals in some cases. For example, the young women served by TPC are transitioning out of the child welfare system and must take multiple, time-sensitive actions to prepare for independent living. One of the main tasks is to collect vital documents such as birth certificates and Social Security cards, which can be tedious. The research strongly indicates that programs should create a clear and orderly “map” of long-term goals in as few domains as possible to counteract the tendency participants may have to hop among goals or to be paralyzed by indecision when confronted with a large number of choices.<sup>15</sup> In general, programs should communicate with participants in a way that is simple, attention grabbing, motivating, and focused on action.

The CABS team worked with TPC to create a visual map that connects long-term goals to intermediate milestones, document requirements, and support networks (shown in Figure 1). The roadmap for each domain explains why participants need to collect essential documents and situates this action along the path to achieving bigger goals that are meaningful to the participant and that are tied to deadlines. Behavioral research shows that deadlines are important tools to help people avoid procrastination, and that information is more digestible when partitioned into smaller, topical units.

- **Increasing motivation through visual displays of progress.** Guare, Dawson, and Guare point out that goals have a unique motivational force when they are both self-directed and within reach.<sup>16</sup> A growing literature in behavioral science is specifying the features of the goal-setting process that increase the likelihood that goals will be achieved. For example, Gabriele Oettingen has created an intervention called WOOP (Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan) that includes the step of planning for anticipated obstacles.<sup>17</sup> Other research, particularly in public health, has investigated the role of incentives and other reinforcement mechanisms to increase the likelihood people will stick with their goals. A visual representation of progress provides a self-monitoring and accountability tool that can be understood at a glance.

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<sup>15</sup> Iyengar and Lepper (2000); Shin and Milkman (2016).

<sup>16</sup> Guare, Dawson, and Guare (2017).

<sup>17</sup> Stadler, Oettingen, and Gollwitzer (2010).

Figure 1  
Roadmap Worksheet



# My Roadmap to Housing

Long term goal

Milestone

date

who can help me?

Milestone

date

who can help me?

Milestone

date

who can help me?

Milestone

date

who can help me?

### Things I need to start this journey

- Credit report
- Address history
- Emergency contact
- Foster care records

### What else do I need?

- 
- 
- 
-

CABS worked with the New Moms team to create a form to record daily goals, indicate whether they had been achieved, and if not, to show why (Figure 2). The form creates an expectation that participants will set and complete five goals a week. The form also codes the obstacles to achieving goals, making it easy for a coach to recognize patterns that need to be discussed in greater depth. If these patterns are common among multiple participants, the program can organize an intervention for all. For example, if participants are consistently blocked from achieving goals because they lack child care, the program might help them sign up for subsidized care. The milestone the participant is working toward is recorded on the top of the form to encourage participants to use these daily goals as steps toward their larger goals.

- **Making it more likely that people will attain their goals by helping them plan.** Getting people to think about when, where, and how they plan to complete a task makes it more likely that they will actually do so.<sup>18</sup> This practice is called implementation planning (a version of cognitive rehearsal). Behavioral research tests different techniques to encourage people to create detailed mental plans, for example, by having them write down when they will complete an important step. This practice is encouraged in the worksheets shown in Figures 1 and 2. Coaches may also use implementation planning to increase attendance at coaching sessions.

As more programs explore the intersection of ESC and behavioral science, a standard set of tools can be designed that will meet many programs' needs.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCE

This section describes how two of the Annie E. Casey Foundation grantees, New Moms and TPC, integrated the four components of ESC into their usual services.<sup>19</sup> The two grantees adapted the model in different ways: New Moms adapted it to a 12-week workforce program that includes subsidized employment, and TPC adapted it to individual case management with young parents preparing to leave the child welfare system. The grantees did not adopt every component of the ESC model, and they implemented the model differently. ESC proved to be a flexible approach that was compatible with programs (1) that included one-on-one, goal- or task-oriented case management; (2) that had already adopted motivational interviewing; and (3)

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<sup>18</sup> Milkman et al. (2011).

<sup>19</sup> The third grantee, Grand Rapids Women's Center, did not participate in the implementation research interviews conducted following the pilot.



**Figure 2**  
**Daily Goal-Setting Worksheet**

**NEW MOMS**


## TOP Skills Daily Evaluation

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Week \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ to \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

**This week's goal:**

**SMART Goals are**

- Specific: Who / What / Where?
- Measurable: How much / How often?
- Achievable: Yes / No
- Realistic: Yes / No
- Timely: When?

<b>Daily goal</b> <i>(adding up to my weekly goal?)</i>	<b>I reached my goal</b> <i>(yes/no)</i>	<b>If not, what happened?</b> <i>(choose one of the options from the list)</i>
Monday		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ⓐ Lack of child care</li> <li>Ⓑ Lack of money</li> <li>Ⓒ Issues with family/another person</li> <li>Ⓓ Didn't feel like doing it</li> <li>Ⓔ Other</li> </ul>
Tuesday		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ⓐ Lack of child care</li> <li>Ⓑ Lack of money</li> <li>Ⓒ Issues with family/another person</li> <li>Ⓓ Didn't feel like doing it</li> <li>Ⓔ Other</li> </ul>
Wednesday		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ⓐ Lack of child care</li> <li>Ⓑ Lack of money</li> <li>Ⓒ Issues with family/another person</li> <li>Ⓓ Didn't feel like doing it</li> <li>Ⓔ Other</li> </ul>
Thursday		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ⓐ Lack of child care</li> <li>Ⓑ Lack of money</li> <li>Ⓒ Issues with family/another person</li> <li>Ⓓ Didn't feel like doing it</li> <li>Ⓔ Other</li> </ul>
Friday		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ⓐ Lack of child care</li> <li>Ⓑ Lack of money</li> <li>Ⓒ Issues with family/another person</li> <li>Ⓓ Didn't feel like doing it</li> <li>Ⓔ Other</li> </ul>
<p><b>Goals</b></p>  <p>_____ out of 5 days</p>		<p><i>My biggest obstacle this week was</i></p>

that gave participants a reasonable amount of freedom to choose their goals. Having control over which goals they would pursue was a significant and empowering change for participants who were used to having case workers tell them what to do. New Moms integrated ESC into a workforce program in a novel way, and saw immediate effects on productivity. Coaches at both programs described some participants who seemed to advance toward goals related to self-improvement and self-sufficiency as a result of ESC, but they also had participants who continued to struggle. See Table 2 for a description of implementation at both programs.

**Table 2**  
**Program Descriptions**

New Moms	Teen Parent Connection
<p>New Moms serves pregnant or parenting women under the age of 24 living in Chicago. It offers services in three areas: workforce development, transitional housing, and home visiting. The ESC coaching curriculum was integrated into the workforce-development program. That 12-week program consists of job-readiness classes and paid work experience in Bright Endeavors, a candle-making business. There are 8 to 12 women per cohort (women who join the program at the same time and move through it together). Cohorts begin the program exclusively attending classes conducted by an instructor before moving to a blend of classroom learning and work experience at Bright Endeavors. Bright Endeavors supervisors manage production. Each week, participants also meet one-on-one with a supportive employment specialist to address barriers to employment such as a lack of child care, housing, or health care.</p>	<p>TPC serves pregnant or parenting young women in Georgia between the ages of 14 and 24 who are currently in state custody, who have children in custody, or who are at risk of coming into custody due to involvement with the legal system. Many of the participants live in group homes, though some live independently or with family. TPC coaches have limited influence over the other service providers who interact with women on their caseloads (for example, staff members in group homes or child welfare case workers). TPC takes an explicitly two-generation approach, meaning that it tries to improve outcomes for both a mother and her child. Each participant is connected with a life coach who is trained in an evidence-based parenting skills curriculum. The life coach also helps participants stabilize their lives with referrals to other service providers for things like housing and employment. Life coaches have small caseloads of about five to eight people and spend two hours per week with participants at their places of residence. The first step in the case management protocol is for life coaches to administer a set of screenings and assessments for a mother and child that determine the skills and tasks the pair will work on during counseling sessions.</p>

### **Training and Support for Coaches**

Richard Guare led two days of training for managers and coaches at New Moms and TPC in the summer of 2016. The training exposed staff members to the theory and practice of ESC, providing an introduction to relevant brain research, the definition of

executive skills, and an opportunity for staff members to assess their own executive-skills profiles. Guare spent a great deal of time demonstrating how the coaching interaction should progress through a “real play.” In contrast to role plays based on pretense, the real play is authentic — a coach trainee receives coaching based on his or her executive-skills profile and a goal he or she would like to achieve. Guare tried to communicate the balance between helping the participant identify a goal that is a “good fit” (meaning the participant meets the prerequisites for success) and emphasizing the self-directed nature of goal setting.


Coaches left the training excited about the potential of ESC. They said that receiving their own executive-skills profiles and observing the real play made a powerful impression on them. They reported having a fairly good understanding at that point of how to administer the Executive Skills and Getting to Know You questionnaires, why it was important to allow participants to choose goals and to break larger goals into smaller steps, and how to use cognitive-rehearsal techniques. However, some staff members felt they needed a better explanation of how to incorporate environmental modifications and incentives. They wished the training had gone on longer because a lot was packed into a short time. One coach who found the training beneficial wanted more opportunity to do real plays to “pull back some of the layers on what the skills are all about,” and to increase her own confidence.

Recognizing the need for some continuing training and monitoring, a consultant working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation organized check-in calls between Richard Guare and staff members at each of the programs. The managers at these programs also took on the roles of on-site trainers. A manager at New Moms used the training experience to create a guide for new staff members. It was useful for her to be able to lay out for them how things are done — in her words, to “codify how we do things” with checklists and training materials. The director at TPC found that she had to supplement the in-person training to help coaches with the goal-setting component. The director noted that while SMART goal setting is intuitive to managers who use this kind of thinking in business decisions all the time, it was not intuitive to coaches who were trained as social workers. Goals were often missing a deadline for completion or a measurable outcome. The director would help coaches revise the goal statements and bring them back to participants.

### **Adaptations of the Model**

In support calls with ESC designers and internal staff meetings, grantees determined how they would implement the four components of ESC. Figure 3 summarizes the decisions.

**Figure 3**  
**Implementing the Executive-Skills Coaching Model at New Moms and Teen Parent Connection**

	Executive-Skills Assessment	Goal Setting	Environmental Modifications	Incentives
Guare and Dawson's Model	 <p>Coaches should administer the Getting To Know You and Executive Skills questionnaires during the initial meeting.</p>	 <p>Coaches should regularly help participants create SMART goals, breaking large goals into smaller steps. The timing of SMART goal setting is unspecified.</p>	 <p>Coaches should discuss with participants ways to modify a situation or task that make it easier for the individual to complete a SMART goal.</p>	 <p>Coaches should provide rewards when participants complete tasks related to a SMART goal.</p>
New Moms	 <p>Coaches gave participants the Executive Skills Questionnaire in a classroom setting and discussed the results in one-on-one meetings.</p>	 <p>Coaches worked with participants to set daily SMART goals during an end-of-day huddle and weekly SMART goals during one-on-one meetings.</p>	 <p>Coaches used a text-messaging application to send participants reminders and used a neutral space where participants could go when they needed to regulate their emotions.</p>	 <p>Coaches did not link rewards to SMART goals but offered incentives for unpaid program activities such as job searching.</p>
Teen Parent Connection	 <p>Coaches gave participants the Executive Skills Questionnaire midway through the program in one-on-one meetings.</p>	 <p>Coaches helped participants set SMART goals during weekly meetings.</p>	<p>The program did not create new environmental modifications.</p>	<p>The program did not include incentives.</p>

**Executive-Skills Assessment**

Although the Executive Skills and Getting to Know You questionnaires were envisioned as assessments that would be delivered in the first one-on-one meeting, New Moms asked participants to complete the questionnaires in a classroom

setting. The results were later shared with a staff member known as the supportive employment specialist, who discussed it with participants in weekly one-on-one meetings. The supportive employment specialist is the primary “coach” envisioned by the ESC model, but other staff members were trained in ESC and used elements of the model in the classroom and on the Bright Endeavors production floor.

At TPC, staff members known as life coaches started using ESC with women in their existing caseloads after the training ended. One coach framed the questionnaires as a sign that their interaction had “graduat[ed] to the next level.” In general, TPC staff members did not think introducing ESC midstream into existing case management relationships was a problem, since the young women they worked with were “always changing their minds, trying to figure out something else, dealing with a crisis.” They had many opportunities for fresh starts, and the executive-skills assessment and goal-setting procedures were incorporated at those moments. In any case, it was not practical to administer additional questionnaires to young people when they joined TPC because the program already conducted several lengthy assessments at enrollment.

Coaches generally spoke positively about the questionnaires and how they set the course for the rest of the coaching. Participants were occasionally surprised by what the questionnaires revealed about their top skills, but more often felt the results were in line with their own perceptions of their strengths. (Their most common top skills and weakest skills are listed in Table 3.) The main challenge all coaches described was eliciting honest self-assessments, possibly because the items were developed for adults so the young people taking the questionnaires could not always relate the situations described, or possibly because participants viewed it as a “test” and wanted to score high.<sup>20</sup> In many cases, coaches identified participants’ weak skills on their own through observation. Although coaches were instructed to share their own profiles with participants, they did not do so consistently.

**Table 3**  
**Summary of Executive Skills Across**  
**All Participants**

Top Skills	Weakest Skills
Goal-directed persistence	Emotional control
Metacognition	Response inhibition
Working memory	Stress tolerance

SOURCE: Data compiled by Sarah Griffen.

<sup>20</sup> The questionnaire has since been revised to make the response categories more relevant to young people who are not working or in school.

### *Goal Setting*

The model calls for an initial period in which the coach and participants work together to establish long-term goals and ensure that those goals are a good fit for the participant. Then the participant takes the lead in pursuing goals through a process of creating medium-term SMART goals and breaking them down into immediate action plans.

New Moms incorporated goal setting at three points: during weekly one-on-one meetings with the supportive employment specialist, and on the production floor at Bright Endeavors in the morning and at the end of every day.

- At the weekly meetings, the supportive employment specialist focused on long-term self-sufficiency goals related to education, housing, or employment.
- At Bright Endeavors, supervisors posted individual production goals for each worker on a whiteboard. Goals were expected to be completed by midday, and the supervisor checked in on progress before lunch each day. Staff members reported that production output increased by 25 percent after they introduced this practice.
- At the end of the workday, participants were asked to write down and share SMART goals they planned to complete overnight or, if it was the end of the week, by the following Monday. (Table 4 lists some of the SMART goals participants at New Moms and TPC created during this pilot project.) Each morning the group would reassemble to check on outcomes. Peers held each other accountable for composing goals that met the SMART criteria, and for completing them. They became comfortable with the practice of setting and completing goals, even pointing out when staff members set unrealistic goals for themselves. This peer support was an innovation in the model. However, over time, coaches observed that the participants tended to set “maintenance” goals at the end of the day such as doing laundry or going grocery shopping. These goals did not relate to their long-term self-sufficiency goals, and while they were usually achieved, the program did not have a systematic way of tracking what happened when they were not, which meant that the program missed out on an opportunity to identify systemic barriers to success.

One of the challenges at New Moms was coordination across settings. The daily goals established at Bright Endeavors were not shared with the supportive employment specialist, making it difficult to align the daily and long-term goals. The worksheet CABS created for New Moms was designed to address this problem.

**Table 4**  
**A Selection of SMART Goal Statements Created**  
**During Coaching**

- 
- Discuss court date and feelings with my mother in the next two weeks
  - Make a positive statement about myself three times per week
  - On 1/9/17, go to [address] for a shelter referral and stay with a friend for the night
  - Attend class daily for one week and reward myself at the end!
- 

SOURCE: Data compiled by Sarah Griffen.

During the initial assessment stage of the TPC program, participants set long-term goals in several areas related to the transition to adulthood (for example, education and housing) and made plans to collect all of the vital documents they would need for themselves and their children. These plans and goals often generated a long list of tasks a participant would have to complete in a short time, which could be overwhelming. TPC life coaches thought ESC helped by emphasizing the importance of having one or a small number of long-term goals at any time, and by allowing the participant to determine what she would do next. “It gives them a sense of calmness,” a coach explained. “It allows us to break [down a task] into small pieces. Doing goals gave them some sort of stability because they had to accomplish one thing and it didn’t feel like all the 100 other things because they chose it.” All coaches emphasized the importance of this sense of control as a way to help participants focus.

The coaches also described how ESC helped them redefine their role and gave them specific techniques to use in case management. Before the training with Richard Guare, life coaches at TPC used the results of their assessments and parenting curriculum to structure the interaction with their cases. They set high-level goals and did not always break them down. One coach explained how she often took the lead with participants in an effort to save them from distress:

Prior to [ESC] coaching, I saw myself as a mother or aunt figure trying to rescue them from what they were going through. Now I see it more as trying to guide my younger self; helping them get to a point where they can help themselves. I feel that I am just supporting them and giving them the tools to support themselves.

ESC helped this coach establish appropriate boundaries and improved her sense of professionalism. A TPC coach captured other coaches’ views when she said that ESC gave her “more structure in a looser sense, and put goals into the hands of the girls.” It clarified that the decisions participants make about which goals to pursue are right, even if the coach might have chosen differently.

Still, the coaches had questions about how to implement ESC. A coach at New Moms admitted that she never felt sure if she was doing ESC correctly, because it can be a very subtle communication strategy. If a participant says she is going to a job fair, and the coach asks her what she will wear, how she will get there, and what time she will leave, is that ESC? When a participant arrives at a session with an immediate crisis that takes precedence over her action plan for the week, how should that be handled? How explicitly should coaches discuss a participant's strengths and weaknesses in executive skills when setting goals? What are the best ways to reengage participants who are not achieving their goals? Coaches did not always feel confident about their implementation of the approach, despite their general endorsement of the method.

### ***Environmental Modifications***

It is not clear from the data available for this report whether coaches systematically incorporated environmental modifications into their action-planning discussions with participants, as called for in Step 9 of the process (see Table 1). It appears that they probably did not, because they also generally expressed uncertainty about this component.

The program-level environmental modifications were easier to observe. After the ESC training session, New Moms obtained licenses for a text-messaging application called *Remind Me* in an effort to increase attendance at the first day of class. The program reported that it then had its best first-day attendance in three years. Noting that many participants have trouble with emotional control, New Moms also designated a neutral space where participants could go to manage their feelings. The space did not get as much use as the program had hoped, and staff members discussed alternative strategies with Richard Guare. As explained earlier, CABS provided advice and redesigned materials to help New Moms reduce the drop-off in attendance and participation that occurred during the application and orientation process, simplify program documents, and revise the forms used to record daily SMART goals (making them more obviously steps on the way to bigger self-sufficiency goals).

The main environmental issue that affected TPC participants' ability to achieve their goals was lack of cooperation from other service providers and case managers who had authority over them, especially staff members at group homes. TPC staff members sometimes felt that their efforts were sabotaged by these external staff members. Life coaches tried different strategies to collaborate with these other service providers, including meeting separately with case workers from external agencies to discuss participants' cases, but nothing worked consistently.



The other issue TPC staff members encountered during the pilot period was how to use the program's existing assessments, which were lengthy, alongside the Executive Skills and Getting to Know You questionnaires, without overwhelming new participants. The CABS team created forms with strong visual design to record long-term goals and milestones in the different domains. The forms included some of the content that would have been covered in TPC's assessment, making it possible to shorten that protocol.

### ***Incentives***

Neither program implemented a targeted incentive program to reward participants for achieving goals, nor did the coaches seem to consistently remember to encourage participants to reward themselves. Coaches used verbal praise to motivate participants. The programs did not receive additional funding to create new incentives. New Moms had an incentive program in place in which participants earned "New Moms Dollars" for attending unpaid activities such as Friday job searches; New Moms Dollars could be used to shop in the program's on-site boutique. TPC did not provide incentives for participation in the program.

## **Participants' Experiences**

We asked coaches to illustrate their experiences implementing ESC through the stories of participants. One of the striking themes in these stories is how central interpersonal relationships are to the participants' journeys. The first two are success stories, in which emotional control and response inhibition were vital factors that allowed the participants to ask for help, avoid disruptive entanglements, and achieve larger goals related to self-sufficiency.

### ***Kayla and Loretta: Ready for Change***

A coach from TPC described her work with an 18-year-old mother named Kayla.<sup>21</sup> Kayla had been in the program for some time but did not connect with the life coach she had been assigned. She had a history of abuse, which made it very hard for her to develop positive social connections. "She was always stirring things up," her coach explained. "She didn't like anyone. I told her that I'm working on e-skills [coaching] and she said she wants to try because she wanted to work on something. I was excited; it was a big deal to hear her say she wanted to do something." The executive-skills assessment confirmed that Kayla had trouble with self-regulation, and that her top skill was organization. Anxious about her social isolation, Kayla said that her goal was to have more friends. Kayla and the coach set action steps related to her interpersonal skills: looking at and speaking to people, re-

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<sup>21</sup> All names and identifying attributes have been changed to protect the participants' privacy.

sponding politely to greetings, learning to walk away from potential conflict. Over time, Kayla reported successes in each of these areas. Her coach described how she had recently reached out by text to apologize for missing a meeting and asked to be connected with services. “My successes are rated differently. If a girl says sorry for missing an appointment when she wouldn’t say hello to me six months earlier, that’s a success.”

A coach from New Moms shared the story of 21-year-old mother of two, Loretta. Petite and fiery, Loretta excelled in the social enterprise program at New Moms. She was smart and liked to make plans to stay on track. She was a strong worker who was often invited to promote the program in the community. Loretta’s top executive skills were metacognition and working memory; response inhibition was her weakest. She did not have stable housing and faced turmoil in her personal life. She had a tendency to gossip and had gotten into fights that landed her in jail more than once. Loretta set goals related to being more patient, especially with other women, and related to self-sufficiency, and had success in both areas. Loretta was accosted on the street at one point and filed for a restraining order against the person instead of getting into a fight in front of her children. She secured a full-time job with benefits and advancement opportunities, moved into her own apartment, and got her children into day care. Still, when the coach checked in with Loretta following her graduation from the program, Loretta described a litany of personal problems that threatened her progress. The coach’s response was, “Okay, what do we need to do today?”

The successful participants generally were ready for change and had strengths such as organization and metacognition that allowed them to make plans and monitor themselves.

### ***Carla and Sheri: Hampered by Setbacks***

Participants rarely had social support systems they could rely on, and contended with unreliable or sabotaging relationships. In the stories coaches shared of participants who had not made progress, these factors were prominent.

Carla was a young adult in her early 20s with a 5-year-old daughter. “She was accomplishing goals by herself, then things would unravel,” her coach explained. For example, two of her goals were to find a safe place to live and get a job. But when her mother (who has addiction issues) would ask for help, family took precedence. Carla found an apartment and struggled to organize her affairs or pack for the move. The coach tried different strategies, and found that Carla would accomplish an action only to have to redo it later because of a setback. When her family saw that she had

a job, they would ask for money and Carla would lend them cash, leaving her short. According to the coach, Carla did not score high on any executive skills.

A coach from New Moms described Sheri, a woman in her early 20s with two children who had tried multiple times to complete the 12-week job-training program. When Sheri arrived at the social enterprise orientation in November, it was her third attempt. At the time, Sheri was living in the building, in housing provided by New Moms. The coach said Sheri's challenges revolved around the following kinds of issues: time management, working memory, sustained attention, and goal-directed persistence. She missed a lot of days of the program due to child care and time-management issues, and would never call to explain her absence. The coach tried cognitive-rehearsal techniques to support better attendance by asking questions like: "What time do you wake up? What time do you drop the kids off?" It would be helpful for a day or two, and then the same pattern of absenteeism and lack of communication would recur. The administrators and Sheri jointly decided that she should take a "pause" from the program to get her child care situation in order. She did not return. Although she continued to live in the building and was invited to job club and other employment-related events, she did not engage in them. The last thing the coach heard, Sheri had started a high school equivalency program and was receiving support from the housing case manager. An advantage of the comprehensive services delivered by New Moms is that a participant who does not engage in one program may be served by another.

These stories demonstrate the extent to which participants needed help to understand executive functioning, manage their interpersonal relationships, and navigate administrative processes. Their victories were precarious and required constant vigilance. Janene's story demonstrates this dynamic well.

### ***Janene: A Story of Perseverance***

A participant in TPC, Janene's goal was to complete her high school equivalency, though she was reluctant to enroll in a test-prep program because of her fear of failure. She knew that her mother did not think she would ever commit to one, because she had been talking about it for so long. The coach decided to go with Janene to a practice session where Janene took a sample equivalency exam and scored higher than she expected. That success helped her overcome her fear and make the decision to enroll. Unfortunately, she soon dropped out again. Janene blamed the schedule, saying that the morning class was too early and that she did not have child care for the evening class. The coach was undeterred and patiently walked through the action steps for reenrolling, with a special focus on finding a time that would work for Janene. Five months later, Janene was back in class.

Setbacks from forces outside their control are a regular part of the lives of at-risk young adults. The essential challenge for ESC is to help them manage their behavioral responses and stay focused on longer-term goals in the face of immediate crises. Eventually, they will need to manage their responses and stay focused without the support of a coach. The ESC model is designed to teach these skills and anticipates that coaching will gradually “fade out” in the final step (Step 11 in Table 1).

## NEXT STEPS

The pilot produced several insights that should inform future investments in ESC.

- **ESC is an adaptable style of coaching that can be integrated into different program contexts where motivational interviewing is in place and the service philosophy is participant-centered. It showed particular promise in New Moms’ workforce program.** This pilot project shed light on the types of programs that could incorporate ESC. Each of the grantees had completed training in motivational interviewing and had a management structure that allowed participants to set their own goals to some degree. These elements seemed to be clear prerequisites for ESC. It will be important to specify other indicators that an organization is ready to implement ESC, such as caseloads of a certain size or a certain frequency of contact between coaches and participants.
  - Next step: The field must further clarify the conditions related to organizational capabilities, service philosophy, and management style that are necessary for ESC to be adopted.
- **ESC is well suited for teenagers and young adults, and may be particularly helpful for young people who are subject to restrictive systems, but better coordination across programs is needed.** Young people seemed to benefit from having coaches to build their self-awareness and supplement their weaker skills or those they were still developing. The young women served during the pilot period often had weak family ties, making the coach an especially valuable resource. Coaches spoke about the positive impact of putting young people who are constantly being told what to do in a position to make their own decisions with the support they need. However, the coaches felt that their efforts were at times undermined by other service providers who took a more authoritarian approach or who did not grasp the relevance of executive skills to the demands their agencies put on young people. In advocating for more cross-agency training in ESC, a TPC coach remarked, “Imagine these girls not knowing their strengths and weakness and we’re asking them to do all these things!”

- ▣ Next step: Since it is common for at-risk teenagers and young adults to interact with multiple benefit providers and supervisory systems, the field should test and document strategies that use ESC as a common language to coordinate services across agencies.
- **Proper implementation of ESC requires intensive training, continuing technical assistance related to coaching and designing environmental modifications, and well-designed tools for tracking goals.** Coaches were eager to apply ESC, but many felt that they needed more training to become confident in its execution. A manager at New Moms suggested that it might be useful to write case studies for use in training. Managers play an important role supporting day-to-day implementation and orienting new staff members, so a “train the trainer” model based on them may be appropriate. All of the programs needed help designing program-level environmental modifications, especially tools they could use with participants to organize their short-term actions in pursuit of long-term goals, and ways to provide encouragement in response to their accomplishments.
  - ▣ Next step: Training and technical assistance will need to be expanded to meet demand as the number of programs implementing ESC continues to rise.
- **Because it is possible to implement some parts of the model while not implementing others, it will be important to establish minimum requirements for implementation, and provide adequate funding to support each component.** The pilot project demonstrated that programs will adapt ESC to their current service environments and may not implement each component without additional funding — in particular incentives linked to the achievement of goals. The flexibility of ESC is an asset, but minimum requirements must be established to ensure fidelity to the model.
  - ▣ Next step: The field must use evidence to establish the connections between specific program components and outcomes, and between the quality of implementation and outcomes.

The short pilot project described in this report was meaningful to the programs involved. Administrators from New Moms and TPC described ways they hope to sustain what they learned by creating in-house resources for continuing staff training, and developing ESC training for other programs in their networks. It is now up to researchers, technical-assistance providers, and funders to catch up to their enthusiasm with the necessary support.

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