

A. Schwartz Research Group Interview

Thu, 5/28 5:39PM • 34:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mentee, people, disability, mentoring, maryann, project, timur, arielle, alex, coping, learned, jesse, important, podcast, question, inaudible, listening, marianne, mh, share

SPEAKERS

Marianne, Jeff Sheen, Alix, Alex Schiwal, Tara, Timur, Jesse

Jeff Sheen 00:04

music plays Welcome everyone to the Mental Health Crossroads podcast. I'm your host, Jeff Sheen, and today I'm with a wonderful group of young adults in the Boston area. And we're gonna go around the room and let them introduce themselves. So we'll start with Marianne. Do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself?

Marianne 00:26

Sure, I'm Marianne. I am 21 years old. I'm in a post graduate program through the public schools called Community Connections and I work at Temple Shalom, and I work at the YMCA. I also have a brother and a sister. And yeah.

Jeff Sheen 01:03

That's great. It's nice to meet you, Maryann, I appreciate you being on our podcast today.

Marianne 01:07

Thank you.

Jeff Sheen 01:08

So next to you is Alix. Alix, do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself?

Alix 01:13

Sure. So hi, my name is Alix. I'm a peer mentor at Boston University. I love going to the beach and I really just want to help people.

Jeff Sheen 01:21

That's great. Do you have a favorite beach that you go to?

Alix 01:24

I love going to the beaches in Rhode Island.

Jeff Sheen 01:26

Nice. I lived right by Revere Beach for a while.

Alix 01:31

Oh, great.

Jeff Sheen 01:34

And then we have Jesse. Jesse, do you want to introduce yourself?

Jesse 01:37

My name is Jesse. I am 20 years old. I also go to the Community Connections program at Newton public schools, and I also take classes at Massachusetts Bay Community College. I have an internship job at Newton City Hall and I also have this job here at Boston University.

Jeff Sheen 02:03

Great. Thanks, Jesse. Sounds like you're pretty busy.

Marianne 02:06

We all are I think.

Jeff Sheen 02:08

Yeah, I think you all are. This is great. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to me today. And then I think next to Jesse, we have Timur.

Timur 02:16

I'm Timur. I'm 42 years old and I am doing a research job at Boston University. Peer mentoring project.

Jeff Sheen 02:39

Great. It's nice to have you all together. Thanks, Timur. Marianne, we talked a little bit before we started recording, would you mind giving us just the audience a little bit of an idea of how you all know each other and what project you work on together?

Marianne 02:53

Sure. So, me and Jesse, I mean me, Timur, and Alix are alumni of Community Connections. And Jessie and I are current students of Community Connections.

Jeff Sheen 03:15

Great. Can you tell me a little bit since I'm not familiar what Community Connections is?

Marianne 03:20

So we all did a peer mentoring, we all are doing a peer mentoring program. I, the young woman that I mentored was in Stoneham. One of my -and it was a little bit of a long ride for me, Newton to Stoneham. It took place on Saturdays. We would do all sorts of different activities like coping strategies.

We would have an icebreaker game at the beginning. And then we'd have like some sort of like activity. And then like we would practice their coping strategies with them to like help people with their anxiety.

Alix 04:30

We wanted to help research coping strategies with somebody with anxiety. See what activities were better for them to do, and make them not have that much anxiety. Because when we first started it, a lot of these people had a lot of anxiety but then towards the end the anxiety went down.

Jeff Sheen 04:47

That's great, and that's the research that you were all part of with Arielle. Great, so some of the folks that are going to be listening to our conversation today have hopefully listened to our conversation with Arielle that we did a couple of weeks ago. I would love to hear from each of you and we can go around the room. And maybe we'll start with Timur. But let's talk about what's been your favorite part about working on this project?

Timur 05:14

Oh, so I've done mentoring before, usually in a larger group, but this is the first time I've done mentoring one-on-one.

Jeff Sheen 05:29

So you liked being one-on-one with another person and providing them with some mentoring.

Timur 05:35

Right?

Jeff Sheen 05:37

That's great. Jesse, what about you what's been your favorite part of this project?

Jesse 05:41

My favorite part of this project was traveling from Newton to Stoneham and then having icebreaker games and coping strategy practice with my mentee at Salem State University.

Jeff Sheen 06:04

And how did you travel to Salem State? How long of a trip was that?

Jesse 06:09

It was about an hour.

Jeff Sheen 06:15

Wow, that's a long trip. So you really like the icebreakers with your mentee?

Jesse 06:21

Yes.

Jeff Sheen 06:23

And then Alix, what about you? What was your favorite part about being part of this project?

Alix 06:28

Working with people, getting to know my mentees, hanging out with them, learning about them, telling them about feedback from the staff. We would have weekly phone calls about how the mentee was doing and just being in charge of like how to help them.

Jeff Sheen 06:46

Great. Thanks, Alix. How about you, Marianne? What was your favorite part?

Marianne 06:50

So my favorite part of this, about working on this project, was getting to know the mentees and connections as we engaged with them. And also, I didn't write this down on the piece of paper, but one more thing was we went to Dunkin Donuts numerous times. And you gotta love your coffee. So, I love doing that. So, yeah.

Jeff Sheen 07:24

You know, one of the things I missed the most about living in the Boston area is the Dunkin Donuts. We don't have Dunkin Donuts where I live isn't that's wild, huh?

Marianne 07:32

That's messed up.

Jeff Sheen 07:36

Yeah, good coffee at Dunkin Donuts for sure. So, great. So let's talk a little bit maybe if we can, those are some of your favorite things about being part of this project, meeting the mentees, doing the icebreakers, working with other people to help them. What was maybe the hardest thing for each of you to work on this project and maybe we can go back around the table the other direction and Marianne we can start with you. You can tell us what's the hardest thing about working on this project?

Marianne 08:04

Sure, the hardest thing I'm working on this project was knowing what to write in our mentoring script. Because I didn't know how my mentee was going to answer the questions. And also, planning transportation was hard. Because my mentee was in Stoneham, which was like, an hour away from me.

Jeff Sheen 08:33

So you have to put in a lot of effort to get connected with your mentees. You're all, sounds like you needed to travel at least a little bit of a ways to meet up with them. And that was part of your- the challenge with being one-on-one with them.

Marianne 08:45

Correct.

Jeff Sheen 08:46

Yeah. Alix, how about you? What was the hardest part of this project for you?

Alix 08:50

Sure. So sometimes with my mentee it was a little hard to understand them, because when they were talking, they had some speech delays. So I'd have to ask them, can you please repeat that? What were you trying to say or ask them in a different way. And another mentee that I had, he had a lot of anxiety. So sometimes we would have to cancel meetings, or I would have to talk them down to see how I can support him during that day.

Jeff Sheen 09:14

Yeah, that's all good information. So this is not a question that's on the list. What kind of training did you all get to be a mentor? Does anybody want to talk about the training you got to be a mentor?

Alix 09:29

So Arielle, like really helped us learn about what all the questions that could be asked, we did a lot of research before we went to meet one-on-one with them.

Jeff Sheen 09:39

Great, and then if you had trouble or you had things that you weren't sure what to do, did you talk to Arielle about, hey, this is what happened today. I'm not sure how I should do this. Did you get some coaching that way?

Alix 09:52

So we had a lot of coaching. So we would have a person that we talk to once a week about talking about the script and our binders and we would use those binders about what we would say. And every time when there was a problem, our phone would be on hand. We could either call them or text them, and they would be available to help us with the situation right then and there.

Jeff Sheen 10:12

Oh, that's great. That's great to know. Well, Jesse, let's get back to you and and what was the hardest thing about working on this project for you?

Jesse 10:20

The hardest thing for me was data analysis after mentoring was over.

Jeff Sheen 10:29

What kind of data analysis did you do after you were mentoring?

Jesse 10:33

The kind of data analysis we did was really to whether the mentees' mental health became positive or negative after mentoring.

Jeff Sheen 10:53

Oh, great. Okay. So that was you found that was a little bit challenging.

Jesse 10:57

Yes.

Jeff Sheen 10:59

And what did you do? When that was felt hard to do, did you have help to do that? Or hat did you do to solve that?

Jesse 11:05

I asked for help.

Jeff Sheen 11:07

Great. How about Timur. What was a hard thing for you about working on this project?

Timur 11:13

It was hard to share about my disability and mental health condition with both the group and my mentee.

Jeff Sheen 11:27

Yeah, I appreciate you. Appreciate you saying that. Sometimes it's difficult to share things about ourselves that are that can be feel pretty private if we don't know somebody very well. And I appreciate that can be challenging for a lot of us to talk about some of the things that are more personal.

Timur 11:45

Yeah.

Jeff Sheen 11:46

Yeah. But it's probably an important part of sharing to help build that relationship with your mentee, I would guess. Yeah. So they kind of understand that you know, what they're experiencing as well. Great. Well, thank you. So I'm curious now what you think that you might have learned by being part of this team. That was one of the questions we wanted to talk about. Does anybody? Maybe we could start with Alix, what did you learn by being part of this team?

Alix 12:16

I learned a lot about how to plan things like going somewhere with my mentee. What parts would be be hard for them, what parts would be easy. My dedication and following up with my supporters and telling them every step of the way. Like how the person did, what are we going to do today? And really, communication was the key.

Jeff Sheen 12:37

Yeah, that's great. That's a lot of important things to learn that you can use in all kinds of different jobs, right. What about Jesse, what about you? What did you learn by being part of this team?

Jesse 12:51

I learned about the term stigma and how that term relates to mental health. I also learned about how every goal has barriers and support, which are ways you can and cannot achieve your goal. And as far as being a researcher, as I mentioned, just now, we collected data and made a decision about how we'll continue in mentoring based on that data.

Jeff Sheen 13:33

Yeah, you said a lot of important things there. I think, as we do research, and as we do any kind of project, really, there's things that go the way we plan and there's things that don't go the way we planned. Being able to learn how to make a new plan and adjust, like you said, you know, addressing barriers that come up and, oh, that didn't work. Now, what are we going to do now? And I think that's part of the fun about being part of a team is you don't have to have all of the answers. But as a team, you can come up with some good ideas of how to address barriers or problem solve something. So I appreciate you kind of sharing that perspective. Timur what about you? What are some of the things that you learn from being part of this team?

Timur 14:17

Well, before we started that before we started actually mentoring, the actual mentoring, something we learned from Arielle was how to deal with our mentees when they, at a time when they express unsafe behavior or thoughts.

Jeff Sheen 14:47

Yeah, so you learned that kind of interaction with people and how they're expressing their behaviors and thoughts and what you can do in that situation as a mentor to be supportive.

Timur 14:57

Right.

Jeff Sheen 14:58

Yeah. This is so great to talk to you all, because these are such important skills that we all need in all kinds of different parts of our day, right when we're at work or we're with our friends. Understanding what other people are thinking and feeling and how we can be supportive. How about you, Mariann, what about you? What is some of the things that you've learned from being part of this team?

Marianne 15:20

Oh. So kind of going off of what Alix said, is we do a lot of planning about peer mentoring. Knowing what we're to do with the mentees? When are we going to do it? What's going to be in the script? And also, you'll have to know what to say. And you have to know how to get there. And you have to take a lot of things into consideration, like the weather and what you want to do with your mentee. So there's a lot of pieces to the puzzle. You know what I mean?

Jeff Sheen 16:21

Yeah, sounds like there's a lot going on in this project. I'm curious, had any of you worked on a project like this before? Or is this the first time you've worked on a project like this?

Alix 16:31

I have never worked on a project like this before.

Timur 16:33

For me it's the first time too.

Jeff Sheen 16:35

First time for a lot of you. So here's a follow up question, then. Why would you want to keep working on projects like this for a long time?

Alix 16:44

I want to do this as a full time job.

Timur 16:48

Yeah.

Jeff Sheen 16:49

Cool. So it's been it's been a good experience. So, I think we're on the question about what do you think other people learned from this project? Is that where we're at from your notes?

Timur 17:03

Yeah.

Jeff Sheen 17:04

Okay, so let's go to that question and maybe we can do. Alix, can you talk a little bit about what you think other people learned from your project?

Alix 17:14

Um, they learned. You mean like the mentees, what they learned? Or what we learned?

Jeff Sheen 17:21

Yeah, so we kind of talked a little bit about some of the things that you learned as an individual. What about some of the people that you worked with? What do you think they learned?

Timur 17:30

Well, it's a little different answer. So I said, people, well, we also learned that people can have a disability and a mental health condition, etc.

Jeff Sheen 17:56

Yeah, that's really important. And that's why we're doing this podcast is we're talking to different groups that understand that someone can have a disability as well as a mental health condition at the same time. And how can we be most supportive and help them to live the best life and to have the things they need to thrive and be happy and independent and all of those things? So yeah, go ahead, Marianne.

Marianne 18:24

So it's important to do coping strategies when they're stressed. There are many different options for coping strategies.

Jeff Sheen 18:35

Do you want to talk a little bit about some of the strategies you might have worked with on with your mentee?

Marianne 18:39

Sure, we worked on like listening to music as a coping strategy. How is this making you feel right now? Like is it making you feel relaxed, is it making you feel stressed? So I would give her some like types of feelings that and I would ask her like how she felt? And then her coping strategies changed so her next one was going for walks in the community. So we would like walk from her house to Dunkin Donuts. Then we would walk in Dunkin Donuts, like around Stoneham, and then back to their house. We would map out the walks during like the previous meeting, so that during that meeting we could just go on the walk, and we didn't have to like plan it out or anything.

Jeff Sheen 20:15

So I heard that you so you listening to music was one of the coping strategies and then going for walks was one of the coping strategies.

Marianne 20:26

So we did a card sort of like different coping strategies. So we had like, coping strategies on like little cards, and we would put them in order from least favorite to most favorite. Then my mentee would have to pick at least like one or two.

Jeff Sheen 20:58

So, you would do a card sort, that sounds like a great way to help make a decision for the day of what coping strategy to practice.

Marianne 21:05

Yeah.

Jeff Sheen 21:06

That sounds like it would actually be kind of fun to look through those cards and then decide on something. How about Jesse, do you want to say anything about what you think other people learn from your project?

Jesse 21:19

So what one of my mentees' coping strategies was writing songs.

Jeff Sheen 21:31

Was writing songs?

Jesse 21:35

And I shared with her that eight years ago, I got upset when a van driver, in the van next to the van I was on, yelled at the students for putting their hands on the windows, which are made of glass. So then I coped with that by using the song called Bicycle from Queen, and turned it into a song relate to what happened.

Jeff Sheen 22:21

Oh, that's great. I love that song. That's great. That's a great way to use music. It sounds like music is kind of a common coping strategy different ways, either writing a song or maybe listening to music. So I appreciate those thoughts. Does anybody else want to say anything? I can't remember if I made it all the way around the room on that question. If I did, I'm actually really looking forward to this next question. Because this is the question about what advice do you have for other people that would want to be involved in a project like this?

Alix 22:57

So what I want people to know about this project and giving good advice is knowing not to be afraid of someone with a disability. They have so many strengths and abilities. They are really amazing, to just get to know them.

Jeff Sheen 23:12

Yeah, that's so fantastic. You know, that's one of the things I love about doing this podcast is I get to meet new human beings all the time. It just doesn't matter, whenever you meet a new human being, there's something cool that's going on in their life. They've got some amazing things to share with you, and we can just all learn from each other. So I really appreciate you sharing that thought, Alix. How about you, Marianne?

Marianne 23:36

So the advice that I have for other people who want to do something like our project, is be patient with your mentee. Don't try to rush them, and take your time with research. You don't want to research the wrong question.

Jeff Sheen 23:56

Oh, that's a really good point. Right that sometimes you might start are out with a question and realize that you have to change the question, if you really want to get to what you're looking for, right?

Marianne 24:05

Yeah.

Jeff Sheen 24:06

That's great advice. How about Jesse, and then Timur.

Jesse 24:15

One day my mentee shared with me about mental health, making her have unsafe behavior, and then sending her to the hospital. I was not happy listening to that. So advice I would give is, that people be better prepared for something like that to be discussed.

Jeff Sheen 24:39

Yeah. So to be prepared for some of those difficult situations that you might not be used to handling. Yeah, that's important because we want everybody to be safe. Sometimes people are in a place where they don't feel safe, or they might have behavior that's not going to keep them safe. We need to know what to do in that situation. Thanks, Jesse. How about you Timur?

Timur 25:01

Well, piece of advice I would give to others about this project. If you're someone who's very passionate about working with and educating people with disabilities, be ready to get involved with this project.

Jeff Sheen 25:27

Great, so you would recommend that other people get involved in a project like this.

Timur 25:33

Right.

Jeff Sheen 25:34

Yeah. Are you aware as a group, are there other groups in Massachusetts that do the same thing that you're doing? Are you the only ones in the whole area that do this?

Alix 25:45

I'm not really sure.

Jesse 25:46

Nobody is sure.

Jeff Sheen 25:48

Okay, that's fair. I'm not sure about what we might have here in Utah either. So this is good. We'll let people know about the project and maybe others will want to do the same thing and work with your team. So I think we're on the last question I have. Did I miss any questions?

Marianne 26:08

Yes, you did actually.

Alix 26:10

Number six.

Marianne 26:11

Number six.

Jeff Sheen 26:12

Okay, remind me what that question is.

Marianne 26:15

No. So it was, 'how has working on this project influenced your life?'

Jeff Sheen 26:21

Ah, that sounds like we should not skip that question that sounds like it's an important question to talk about.

Alix 26:26

Yeah.

Jeff Sheen 26:27

So, let's talk about how working on this project has influenced your life and Marianne, maybe you can go first.

Marianne 26:33

Sure, it made me think about how to help others, and analyzing the data made me think about how the mentees felt about the mentoring project. Peer mentoring also helped me think about how to help others self monitor their feelings.

Jeff Sheen 26:56

Excellent. That's a big influence on your life. How about you, Alix?

Alix 27:02

Understanding different people's disabilities, knowing how to cope with them and help them. And also I learned how to communicate better people like my friends like outside of work. Just like knowing when, just like understanding.

Jeff Sheen 27:19

Yeah, that's a really important idea that the things you learned in this project actually helped you in other parts of your own life.

Alix 27:27

Right, like I can have better conversations with people now because that was really hard for me.

Jeff Sheen 27:31

Wow, that's an that's a big change then, and that's gonna be something you'll keep with you throughout the rest of your life.

Alix 27:37

Right.

Jeff Sheen 27:38

Yeah. How about Timur?

Timur 27:41

Well, really the project the way it's influenced my life is that after doing the mentoring, the actual mentoring, inspired me to want to do mentoring in the future.

Jeff Sheen 27:58

That's great. So you want to keep doing the mentoring.

Timur 28:01

Right

Jeff Sheen 28:02

That's wonderful, and how about you, Jesse?

Jesse 28:04

When my mentee was at the time that my mentee shared about being in the hospital, she shared with me that the doctors and nurses disrespected her disability. So the way that this project influenced my life is that it's easy for people who don't have a disability to mistakenly disrespect people with disabilities.

Jeff Sheen 28:37

Yeah, and it sounds like the work that you're doing as a team is hopefully helping people to be more respectful of others' experience and their disability if they have one. Is that fair to say?

Jesse 28:48

Yes, it is. I agree with that you said that.

Jeff Sheen 28:51

Great. Thanks, Jesse.

Jesse 28:52

You're right.

Jeff Sheen 28:53

Did I miss any other questions before we go to what I think is the last one?

Marianne 28:58

No.

Jeff Sheen 28:59

I appreciate you helping me stay on track. So, is there anything else that any of you want to mention about your experience with this project? Anything that we haven't already talked about that you want to kind of end with?

Jesse 29:11

So, I want to share that on the last day of mentoring that my mentee told me that she was or that I was one of the nicest people she has met in her life.

Jeff Sheen 29:27

That's a pretty big compliment. That's great. How about you Timur?

Timur 29:31

Just overall it was an amazing experience, the actual mentoring.

Jeff Sheen 29:36

How about you Alix?

Alix 29:38

So like, I know like, another thing I want to share is like I know like for people with disabilities, it's really hard for making friends. So going to these mentees' houses or boarding schools or wherever they work, really made a difference because they had somebody to hang out with. Because either they don't have a lot of friends. So then if you have a disability you don't have a lot of friends, so spending that hour with someone could really mean something to them.

Jeff Sheen 30:04

Yeah, again, that's so important, right? Just just spending time with other people can be such an important support for them. Thank you. Marianne, what about you?

Marianne 30:13

Yeah. It was fun to be part of the project. I got to meet a lot of new people. I got to work with my classmates, such as Jesse and Timur. We got to do fun coping strategies like listening to music and walking/ strolling. We got to go fun places like yet again, Dunkin Donuts.

Jeff Sheen 30:44

Everything runs on Dunkin.

Marianne 30:46

Yes.

Jeff Sheen 30:48

So, this isn't any question on the list, but the project's not over right? The project's still going or where's the project right now?

Alix 30:57

It's still going. We're doing a lot of research. Right now, we might do another cycle on the program, but I'm not sure. I have to talk to Arielle.

Jeff Sheen 31:06

Yeah, that so I guess probably Arielle and Tara might know some of the plans for the long term future about things. But, Tara, did you want to say anything? I know you're kind of being very helpful moving the camera and stuff. But do you have any thoughts you want to share about your experience working with this team?

Tara 31:23

I mean, I think everybody's shared such insightful things about mentoring. I'm curious to hear more about now that we're in the research phase of mentoring. Cause that's such an important part of this project, too. Right? And what that experience is like for all of you. So like was is the research that we've been doing even in the last two weeks? Just knowing we saw anxiety levels going down instead of up, which is really good. And that means that our program worked. And these posters? So what are some of the things that we did about the feedback?

Jesse 32:09

We made posters about positive feedback. And the mentee is wanting that mentoring to continue the way it was. And we also made a negative poster with feedback from the mentees about ways that they want to change mentoring.

Jeff Sheen 32:36

Yeah, so this is great. I think this is important for the people that might be listening to the podcast to understand is not only were you part of the team that planned this out and then did the mentoring, but you are very much part of the research team that is now looking at what this did for people, what good things it did, what worked, what maybe didn't work as well as you thought and then you're working on with posters and other things, how to report what you found. How to let people know what you learned, right. So that's really cool that you're actually part of the entire process. It's not just part of the thing that you're doing. You're part of the team for the whole process. *music plays*

Alex Schiwal 33:18

Thank you all so much for listening to the MHDD Crossroads podcast where we explore the intersection of mental health and developmental disabilities. We were able to talk to this great group of people back in February. We hope to follow up with them again soon. *music plays*

Alex Schiwal 33:35

In the meantime, you can like, subscribe, and share our podcast wherever you get them. Just look for MHDD Crossroads podcast. Make sure to follow us on social media at MHDD center and go to our website mhddcenter.org for more resources. Until next time, thanks. *music plays*