Get to know us!

Hi, my name is Chris Napolitano, and I am a fourth-year doctoral student at the Institute for Applied Research for Youth Development at Tufts University. As the senior doctoral student on Project GPS, I have been with the program since its start, and I am so excited to be a part of this second newsletter! Your commitment to improve the lives of the youth that you mentor—whether through enhancing their intentional self-regulatory skills, their social relationships, or their jump shots—is inspiring, and I am honored to be associated with a project focused on strengthening the mentor/mentee relationship.

I’m originally from Reading, Pennsylvania (Pretzel / Outlet Capital of the World, Baseballtown, etc.). Since graduating from Boston College in 2008, I’ve been working towards a PhD. in Child Development at Tufts, working primarily with Drs. Richard Lerner, Marina Bers, and Jon Zaff. My research interests focus on the role of serendipity in the lives of adolescents, specifically examining the skills and characteristics of youth who are more likely to “make their own luck” through unforeseen, fortuitous experiences. On a day to day basis, I crunch the data for Project GPS—so keep it coming!

If you are considering adding Project GPS to your program, please feel free to email us with any questions—tuftsgps@gmail.com. If you are part of the Project GPS community, thank you again for making our work a part of your service.

With sincere gratitude,

Chris Napolitano, M.A.

Exemplar Video

Julia talks about her passion for ballroom dancing and how she has worked over the years to become a competitive dancer. As she describes how she worked towards her goal, she uses many GPS skills along the way. Below are examples of how Julia displays persistent effort and how she develops effective strategies.

**Persistent Effort**
- Practices Extra
- Seeks out different teachers
- Prefers to work with teachers who push her

**Developing Strategies**
- Calls friends when she has setbacks
- Researches ways to get better at dancing
- Merges her interests in health and dance
FAQ: What if my youth is struggling with persistent effort, especially with winter vacation up ahead?

Sometimes the biggest challenge in achieving a goal is keeping up the effort and continuing to work at it. Many factors can impact a person’s persistence, such as getting tired, distracted, or stressed.

One way to stay motivated is to think ahead about the process in front of you, and identify moments or tasks that might be the most challenging in terms of fatigue, distractions, and stress. That way, you get the opportunity to prepare for those particularly challenging times, and you can also recognize and understand the feelings that you experience during those times.

Another technique that mentors can use to promote persistent effort is asking youth to remember why they selected the goal in the first place. Whether or not the goal fits your youth can certainly have an impact on effort. Researchers have discovered that youth will put forth more effort towards achieving a goal when the motivation comes from themselves and not from an external source (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In other words, youth will put forth more effort if they are motivating themselves than if the motivation comes from other people.

Taking breaks is also an essential element of maintaining persistent effort. Taking a step back and having a moment to relax can help a person refuel, rejuvenate, refocus, and re-storeself-control (Baumeister, 2002). This upcoming holiday break might be a good time to do just that. Talk to your youth about the importance of rest, both physical and emotional. Brainstorm ways in which they can rest productively over school break and make sure to take care of themselves—do they need more sleep? More exercise? More time with friends and family? Time off can be spent with the intention of rewarding oneself for previous effort and preparing to put forth a lot of effort in the future.

Over vacation, youth can also take some time to reflect on their goals. They can spend time journaling or talking to others about why they selected their goal, what progress they are making, and what they are excited to work on next. Taking a break can provide a relaxing opportunity to rekindle that spark so a youth can come back from vacation happy, strong, and ready to show persistent effort.

Organization Spotlight

Upward Bound is a nationwide, federally funded program that aims to increase college graduation in under-represented populations. The Upward Bound program at Suffolk University has a 6 weeks summer program in addition to school-year programming. We spoke to Michelle Lynch, the Academic Counselor, about her experience using Project GPS in the summer session of Suffolk University Upward Bound.

Why did you decide to use Project GPS?
We had previously discussed how we wanted to work more with our students around setting goals, and then I saw Project GPS at a conference. I attended the workshop and thought the program would be useful for us and that it would help our students take ownership of the process of setting goals while learning some important life skills.

How did you incorporate Project GPS into your program?
During our summer program, we teach a college planning class for each grade level. We decided to use Project GPS with our rising sophomore class and saw good results. We spent two hours every week going over the activities and the component parts of Project GPS and the students seemed to enjoy the process.

How do your students react to Project GPS?
The students enjoyed thinking about goals and then being able to set up a plan for themselves to achieve these goals.

Did you make any changes to make Project GPS more relevant to your program?
We do most of our programming in a group setting, so we used the activities that were most applicable for the group. We even tried altering some activities to be able to do them in a group. The exemplar videos were very useful for our students. The students seemed to like the videos because the videos show how the skills we were learning play out in real life scenarios.

Now that the evaluation process is done, are you still using Project GPS materials?
Now that we’re in the academic year, we evaluate our students, and one of the areas that we look at is personal and social skills. Project GPS is especially useful in helping with these skills. If we find that a student is in need in this area, we set up an intervention. For example, if a student needs help developing strategies, we use Project GPS activities to help build and strengthen these skills.

Any advice for other programs interested in using Project GPS?
Try to use the whole set of materials and work with a team to evaluate which ideas are most applicable to your students. Utilizing a team that knows the strengths and weaknesses of your students will make program implementation easier and relevant for the students.
**Goal Selection**

**Pursuit of Strategies**

**Shifting Gears**

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**Going Deeper with Developing Strategies**

In our experience working on Project GPS so far, we have found that the concept of a “strategy” is one of the most difficult points to clarify. Given that developing strategies is a core element of the GPS model, about it is important to continue discussing what strategies are and how they relate to other concepts such as skills, habits, and the different pieces of a goal.

Strategies are the means or “tools” that you use to reach your goals. Some of these tools you use every day, others you might only use once in a while. Skills on the other hand, are abilities upon which you can continue to build as you develop strategies. To find strategies that are likely to work well for you, start by reflecting on what skills you have. What are your strengths? How can you build upon your skills to create a specific strategy? For example, if your goal is to get stronger and you have good cooking skills, then one of your strategies could be to cook yourself high-protein meals before working out. This strategy not only has the potential to help you get stronger, but you are also likely to develop your cooking skills even more!

Some goals might require you to use a skill that you do not already have. For example, if your goal is to create a recycling program at your school, then one piece of the process might require you to present a proposal in front of a group of people for the first time ever. Therefore, some of your strategies will need to be focused on building public speaking skills. Some possible strategies are planning your speech carefully, practicing in front of a mirror, getting feedback from friends, or deep breathing to calm your anxiety.

The above example involves developing strategies by considering the different pieces of your goal (see Activity 6, “Puzzle Pieces”). Some of your strategies may be useful across all of the pieces of your goal. However, sometimes a strategy that you use to address one “piece” might not apply to the other pieces. You can develop a variety of strategies or have a single strategy that can be used in different contexts and with different resources. You can also figure out which strategies involve just you, which involve connecting with another person, and which strategies you might use with a group of people. By having strategies that you can use in different contexts, you ensure that you are working towards your goal in multiple ways. Below we have a chart that shows how a youth trying to get a summer job might go about developing strategies.

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**Get a Summer Job (Example)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pieces of the Goal</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
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| Going out and Networking               | • Visit stores at the mall  
• Look up job fairs in the area  
• Talk to other youth who have jobs and ask them about openings |
| Filling out applications               | • Use a calendar to mark deadlines  
• Look up job fairs in the area  
• Get feedback from a school guidance counselor |
| Preparing for interviews               | • Brainstorm possible questions  
• Practice with a friend  
• Arrive early! |

Remind your youth that family and friends are going to be curious about what they have been doing lately. Encourage them to talk about their goal and explain the process that they are going through to achieve it. Talking with others can be a helpful tool to keep motivation and effort high.