Hello, my name is Mimi Arbeit, and I am a second-year doctoral student at the Institute for Applied Research for Youth Development at Tufts University. My role on the GPS team has been recruiting programs and working with site coordinators to implement Project GPS in their programs. I want to give a special shout-out to all the site coordinators that I’ve been working with so closely over the past year! Thank you for all the hard work that you do for your youth, and for all the time and energy you put into thinking through the needs of your program and supporting your staff and mentors. It’s an honor to collaborate with you.

Before coming to Tufts, I spent a year working as a mentor to a group of sixth-graders at an afterschool program in Boston. Before that, I spent two years as a middle school health education teacher in a local school district. I really love working with youth, but I wanted to learn more about how to approach health education from a strengths-based perspective, so I came here. My particular focus in graduate school is studying sexuality development in adolescence, with the hope of applying my work to school-based and out-of-school-time programs to promote adolescent sexual health.

If you have any questions for me, or want to hear more about what Project GPS has to offer you and your program, please email tuftsgps@gmail.com or call 617-627-6084.

**GPS Exemplar Video**

Kara describes her struggle to compete in wrestling both as a female and as a person with diabetes. Shifting gears is an essential tactic for Kara because although wrestling is an activity she would like to pursue, her first set of strategies would not allow her to continue. Kara faced many difficulties pursuing wrestling, namely her family’s disapproval of her participation in the sport and her struggle to maintain her health. She also faced many challenges in her attempts to improve as a wrestler, and she had to shift gears in order to overcome these challenges.

### Substituting Strategies
- Changes her diet, sleep, and exercise in order to wrestle
- Increases the frequency of her diabetic testing to make sure she is healthy while wrestling

### Seeking Different Help
- Approaches her coach for support when her family wants her to quit wrestling
- Practices with males on her team in order to get better
FAQ: How can I support my youth in changing goals when needed, without having them feel like they failed?

Part of shifting gears includes re-evaluating progress, which can lead to changing goals. Reasons for choosing a new goal, also known as loss-based selection, can generally be divided into two categories (1) “I can’t achieve the goal” and (2) “I do not want to pursue the goal.” In the Project GPS video exemplars, Trevor serves as an optimal example of shifting gears and choosing a new career goal. In college, Trevor hoped to become a doctor, but soon realized that he did not see himself in an office and taking appointments. Trevor also realizes that his grades are not competitive enough to apply to medical school. Here we see examples of both “I can’t” and “I don’t want to.” Trevor changed his goals without feeling bad by selecting a new goal to become a firefighter, a job which incorporates his previous experience as an Emergency Medical Technician.

Loss-based selection is a skill that successful people use to focus their efforts on goals that make the most sense for their situation. (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2008). However, choosing a new goal and rejecting a previous goal can be really difficult and even emotional for youth. Feelings of sadness and failure, can arise from giving up on a goal, regardless of the reason behind the decision. A mentor can help youth cope with these difficult feelings by empathizing with their situation and by encouraging reflection. You can then work together to figure out what happened and how best to move forward. What did the youth learn in this process? How can these lessons be employed in future projects?

Next, help motivate the youth to come up with a new goal and start the process all over again, remembering what you learned and pursuing new strategies. Recycle successful strategies, create a new roadmap, and address issues that sprung up the last time. The objective is to continue working towards a goal and to use past efforts in a positive way. Finding new motivation, or using previous experiences as motivation, can help future projects.

In our last newsletter, we focused on different strategies for finding a job. Unfortunately, it has become increasingly difficult for teens to find jobs these days, and this goal might become blocked. In this instance, mentors can work with their youth to find other productive ways to spend the summer. Volunteering, interning, or taking a summer class might all be viable options. The key is not to dwell on past failures and instead to focus on the experiences gained.

Organization Chicago Youth Centers

Chicago Youth Centers (CYC) is an organization that provides positive youth development services to seven neighborhoods in Chicago and works to help youth reach their potential. The South Shore Advocates Mentoring Program, sponsored by the Chicago Public Schools, aims services at youth that are at-risk for violence and works to combat this problem in multiple ways. We spoke to the Christy Beighe-Byrne, the Director of Mentor and Volunteer Services, about the program’s experience with Project GPS.

Why did you decide to use Project GPS?
We work within the Positive Youth Development model so using a program that was based on this model was easy. We decided to introduce Project GPS into our social skills workshop and most of the students took well to it and liked using it.

What strategies did you use to incorporate Project GPS in your program?
We run two different workshops that the kids rotate through, and one of them was Project GPS. We used the activities that were more ‘hands-on’ and that could be used with a larger group of students.

How did your students react to the Project GPS curriculum?
They all mostly participated and seemed to enjoy many of the activities. Many of our students are very “hands-on” and liked the interactive activities. One favorite was [Activity 5: Blind Sculpture Building] where they built structures using similar materials and had to describe them to their partner who was on the other side of a sheet so that their partner would build the same thing.

Did you make any changes to make Project GPS more relevant for you?
There is a high rate of illiteracy within our students. Since some sections required worksheets and reading, we paired these students with an adult to help them get through the material. We also had mentors demonstrate the activities for the students in order to show what needed to be done.

Are you still using Project GPS materials even though your participation in the study is over?
We have since implemented a goal checklist at the beginning of every week and our students use it to motivate themselves.

Do you have any advice for other programs interested in using Project GPS?
Our Master’s level interns were in charge of the Project GPS curriculum and since they have gone off to other internships, their experience with the curriculum is also gone. I would suggest having a staff member in charge so that the activities get replicated in a way that best serves your group.
GPS Skill: Substituting Strategies

While working towards your goal, you might come to notice that you are not progressing as much as you had anticipated. This is a perfect time for self reflection. Look at your strategies and see if they are helping you achieve your goal. If you find that they are not really working, use the opportunity to evaluate why that is. It could be, that the strategy you chose is not necessarily the right one for you, or it just does not get the job done. Strategies can also grow ineffective with time, and they require maintenance to make sure they are serving you properly. There are two ways to go about fixing strategies: you can modify a current strategy or you can substitute it.

Modifying a strategy is just what it sounds like—taking a current strategy and making it better. When creating your roadmap, a particular strategy might sound like a good idea, but you really won’t know if it will work until you use it. If in the course of pursuing your goal you find that a strategy is not effective, consider altering it. For example, if your goal is to get a high score on the SATs, and studying with a partner has not proved helpful, you might want to consider finding someone else to study with or you might want to utilize your study time with that partner differently. Small changes to a current strategy can potentially lead to making greater strides towards a goal. Tweaking a strategy to make it better is an important skill and can keep you working towards your goal. On the other hand, if you think that simply changing your partner or the way you spend time studying with your partner is not going to create a significant enough change, you can consider substituting strategies.

Substituting a strategy is best used when you realize that a strategy that you are using is not being helpful and that modifying it will not lead to better results. For example, you may want to learn to play guitar and you decide to go on your computer to find a website with introductory guitar lessons. You set up a practice routine and stick to it diligently, but after a few weeks you realize that you have not progressed very much. Continuing on this path will not lead to you becoming much better at guitar, regardless of how much effort you put forth. Because you realize that sticking with this strategy is not the best use of your time, you might want to consider pursuing lessons with a music teacher or learning from a friend. Understanding the need for a new strategy when a current one is not working effectively, regardless of how much you may modify it, is a useful skill that can help you towards completing your goals.

The chart above describes the process for substituting strategies in the case of studying for the SATs. The first column consists of current strategies used to study. The second column includes possible signs that could mean that the strategy is not working. The last column has a few examples of fixes that can be made to the strategies to either replace them or make them more effective.