

Transcript for Express Yourself Podcast

LR: Hello. My name is Dr. Lisa Razzano. I'm here with Dr. Judith Cook, Director of the University of Illinois at Chicago Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Today, we'll be talking about the self-determination tool called, *Express Yourself! Assessing Self-Determination in Your Life*, which is available from the UIC Solutions Suite.

LR: Thanks for joining me today, Judith. Before we talk about the tool, could you tell our listeners what self-determination is?

JC: Sure Lisa. Self-determination means having the freedom to be in charge of your own life. It involves choosing where you live, who you spend time with, and what you do. It means having the resources you need to make decisions in order to create a good life. It also means choosing where, when, and how you get help for any challenges or problems you face.

LR: That sounds like something we all need in our lives. Why is this important for people with mental health challenges?

JC: Self-determination plays an important role in creating a satisfying and productive life. People who face serious mental health issues may not believe that self-determination is possible for them, due to the stigma and discrimination they often face. This tool is designed to help people take steps toward controlling their own destinies, regardless of whatever challenges they have. It shows them how taking small steps toward reclaiming their lives can lead to bigger changes that help them achieve their dreams.

LR: How does the *Express Yourself!* tool help people enhance their level of self-determination?

JC: *Express Yourself!* guides people through a personal self-assessment of how much self-determination they have in different life areas such as where they live, who their friends are, and how they spend their time. It helps users identify those areas where they'd like to increase their level of self-determination, and other areas in which they're satisfied with the amount of self-determination they have. As they complete the assessment, people become more aware of what self-determination is and how its presence or absence affects their lives. Then they're offered links to specific web sites they can visit in order to increase self-determination in that area. For example, a person wanting more self-determination in the area of transportation is directed to a web site that shows them how to use their local public bus, train, and elevated transit systems. Once the assessment is completed, users are encouraged to think about and share the results with others. They also are encouraged to review and use other Solutions Suite self-determination tools such as *Seeking Supported Employment* for folks who want to work, or *This is Your Life!* our self-directed life planning tool.

LR: Can you tell us more about what kinds of people might want to use this self-assessment?

JC: We created this tool for people who have a mental illness or who have found it hard to do certain things in life because of emotional turmoil or stress. Other people have found it to be useful as well, including those facing important life transitions, such as graduating from high school or college, undergoing separation or divorce, or preparing for release from jail or prison.

LR: Since it's a self-assessment, do most people use it on their own?

JC: Yes, that's most common, but it also has been used by clients working together with their service providers. We've even seen it used in group settings by people in peer-run behavioral health programs, community mental health centers, hospital inpatient units, and high schools. It can be used anywhere that a person or a group wants to learn more about self-determination and how to increase it in their lives.

LR: Would you share one of your favorite stories about using this tool?

JC: Sure. The clinical director of a community mental health program contacted us about a challenge his agency was facing, especially with new clients. He had noticed a gap between what his staff thought client goals should be, and what the clients actually wanted to do. This disconnect was interfering with the ability of staff and clients to work together. We recommended that they use "Express Yourself" as a motivational interviewing tool. We explained that the assessment could help staff see what their clients wanted to work on before staff introduced their own ideas. After several months, the clinical director let us know that staff now had better ideas about what's important to their clients. Staff had also shifted to using strengths-based approaches in supporting their clients' self-determination goals. As a result, "Express Yourself" was now being used with all new clients when they entered the program.

LR: That's a lot of valuable information. Thank you, Judith. And thank you all for listening. We are pleased to offer the *Express Yourself!* self-assessment tool as part of our Solutions Suite to promote wellness and self-direction for people in recovery from mental health conditions.