Youth and Family Voice and Engagement: It’s Foundational Work!
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A man falls into a hole so deep he can’t get out...

A doctor walks by, and the man calls for help. The doctor writes a prescription, tosses it into the hole, and walks on.

A priest walks by, and the man tries again. The priest writes a prayer, tosses it into the hole, and walks on.

Finally a friend walks by, and again the man asks for help. To his surprise, the friend jumps in with him.

“Why did you do that?” the man asks. “Now we’re both in the hole.”

“Yes,” the friend responds. “But I’ve been in this hole before, and know the way out.”
Our job is not to cure kids but rather to help kids and their families negotiate the basic needs of everyday life.

“Residential Treatment” should be oriented not so much around removing problems kids bring to care but toward establishing conditions that allow children and families to manage symptoms and crises more effectively at home and in the community.

Dr. Jim Dalton, Licensed Child Psychologist
President and CEO for Damar Services Inc, IN.
Youth and Families: The Heart of Your Work
Youth Perspective

• Youth know what they need best... ASK them. Being a part of their treatment plan will make them more likely to follow their plan than to follow what they are being “told to do” or what is “told is good for them”

• Incorporating youth voice into your program, not just the youth’s treatment plan is beneficial for the program, the youth, and the family. No one is better to guide your services than the consumer themselves.
On the parent side...

- **So many emotions**: guilt, fear, relief, worry, inadequacy, embarrassment, loss, anger, disconnection, safety concerns
- **Complicated logistics**: how to be involved and maintain employment, geographic distance, financial concerns, using virtual modalities
- Effect on other family members
- Returning home and aftercare
ENGAGING YOUTH AND FAMILIES IS FOUNDATIONAL TO EVERYTHING ELSE YOU DO
Success

what people think it looks like

what it really looks like
1. Youth and Family Initiated and Directed

2. Youth and Family Initiated, Shared Decisions with Adults and Partners

3. Youth and Family and Adult/Partner Initiated and Directed

4. Adult/Partner Initiated, Shared Decisions with Youth and Family

5. Consulted and Informed

6. Assigned and Informed

7. Tokenism

8. Decoration

9. Manipulation
Process of Changing the Culture:

**Old thinking**
- Restraints are necessary to keep the kids safe
- Satisfied with restraint reduction
- Will not Skill
- Blaming the outliers or “Frequent Flyers”
- Confront and Teach
- Blaming one or two new admissions
- When restraints decreased, assaults on staff increased
- Focusing on just youth behaviors in the program

**New thinking**
- Restraints re-traumatize and CAUSE HARM
- Intention to ELIMINATE restraints
- Skill not Will
- “Kids do well if they can.”
- Calm, Comfort, Connect
- All staff create a therapeutic alliance with the youth
- Regulation is contagious
- Focusing on the needs of youth and families
- Staff spending time with youth and families in their own homes and communities

#LEADINGCHANGE
Program Philosophies Associated with Positive Transitions

- Treating young people as emerging adults.
- Partnering with youth in developing and implementing their individualized success plan.
- Individualizing planning focused on each young person’s unique needs, strengths, and preferences.
- Believe in recovery – that young people will go on to lead productive lives.
- High expectations – belief that young people can be successful in careers, college, vocational training, and jobs of their choice.
Youth and Family Roles in Residential Treatment Programs

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Safety, Transparency & Trust, Empowerment, Choice, Collaboration, Mutuality, Culturally Responsive, Peer Support
Engagement Strategies

CULTURE, APPROACH, POLICY & PROCEDURE, TRAINING, ETC.
Family Engagement: It’s all about your approach

- **Organizational culture**
  - Core belief that children/youth belong in families and the community
  - Families must be respected and engaged in all aspects of treatment
  - Facility and staff appearance
  - Embed foundational concepts of pro-family practice in all staff training, for all staff (clinical, care providers, facility maintenance, etc.)
  - Facility terminology
  - Families are welcome 24/7
Family Engagement: It’s all about your approach

• Policy-making and programming decisions
  • Parent Leadership Council, Family Advisory Board
  • Focus groups as part of CQI and development of new policies/programming
  • Visits and phone calls are a right and not restricted or tied to behavior

• Employ parent peer support providers
  • Pre-admission
  • Within the RTC structure
  • Aftercare
Family Engagement:
It’s all about your approach

- RTC strategies: Pre-Admission
  - Intakes held in the home
  - Involve parent peer support providers in the intake process (and as liaison throughout stay)
  - Tour of program/facility (onsite or virtual)
  - Establish best methods of consistent involvement for the family and youth
  - Address and respect parental fears, concerns, perspective
Family Engagement:
It’s all about your approach

• RTC strategies: During RTC stay/treatment
  • Understand the family’s potential need for a “respite” period after admission
  • Involve families (and family/youth support persons) in diverse ways in the program – more than phone calls, therapy, visits
  • Time with family is not contingent on behavior
  • Establish ways for the youth and family to remain connected with community, other providers and supports
Family Engagement: It’s all about your approach

- **RTC strategies: During RTC stay/treatment**
  - Use the Child & Family Team/Wraparound model in individual treatment planning and implementation
  - Ask parents their opinions, ideas, and thoughts about tx BEFORE tx decisions are made, and include them as an equal partner in the decision-making process
  - Family and youth need to define “success” and support in taking steps toward those goals
  - Work needs to happen at home to prepare for successful transition – more than “practice” during home visits
Family Engagement: It’s all about your approach

- RTC strategies: Discharge and aftercare
  - Start at admission talking about return home
  - Begin connecting with aftercare supports *before* discharge is discussed and maintain contact with community providers working with the family
  - Prepare families for discharge and aftercare, esp. the “honeymoon” period
  - Maintain contact with youth, family and community providers as part of the transition team
Youth Engagement

Focus on promoting healing environments
- Reducing restraints and seclusions
- Eliminating point systems

Shifting from an “old thinking” culture to the “new thinking” culture.
- “What happened to you vs. what’s wrong with you”
- Control vs. Helping

Understand impact of trauma on brain and body
- Training all staff in Trauma Informed Care and implementing the strategies to your program
Youth Engagement

- Strong focus on youth voice and choice
- Focus on program practices that are strength-based, collaborative and empowering for youth
- Focus on strategies that support self-soothing/ self-regulation (e.g., individual safety/sothing plans; sensory modulation strategies; holistic approaches- i.e. meditation/yoga/tai chi/rhythmic & repetitive activities)
- Focus on normalizing activities, hope/permanency
Youth Engagement

- Hire staff with expertise in this process.
- Use peers who are already living in the community to teach/model skills.
- Have youth learn and use skills in their daily activities in residential care.
- Normative experiences should not be treated as privileges or withheld to manage behavior.
- Residential providers in remote areas should plan programs and housing to move older youth into the community with support.
Youth Engagement

- Community schools should be used as much as possible.
- Maintain & build network of support.
  
  Youth connection with support system correlates to how youth are doing 10 to 15 years after care.

- Family engagement may play a stronger role in the outcomes than the actual intervention program

- Services accommodate the critical role of peers and friends
Directly from youth and their families...
THIS IS CHALLENGING,
BUT WORTHWHILE WORK --
YOU ARE NOT ALONE!
We’re here to support you!

- Youth MOVE National
- FREDLA
- National TA Network
- Building Bridges Initiative
- Resources
Resources

- Building Bridges Initiative “Promoting Youth Engagement in Residential Settings: Suggestions from Youth with Lived Experience”
  http://www.buildingbridges4youth.org/sites/default/files/Promoting%20Youth%20Engagement%20in%20Residential%20Settings%20-%20Suggestions%20from%20Youth.pdf

- Building Bridges Initiative “Promoting Youth Engagement: What Providers Should Know About Best Practices and Promising Strategies:

- Building Bridges Initiative “Engage Us: A Guide Written by Families for Residential Providers”

- Youth Power! “Working in Collaboration with Youth Partners and Young People: Processes and Protocols to Support Meaningful Youth and Adult Partnerships in Planning and Policymaking Activities”

- Youth Power! “How You Can Support and Foster Youth Involvement”