Youth Empowerment in Systems of Care: Communication, Engagement, and Partnership

Youth United

ssw.umaryland.edu/traininginstitutes
Objectives

- Enhance partnerships through establishing mutual respect between youth and adults
- Identify ways to enhance youth involvement and engagement within system of care activities
- Practice actively listening to young people
- Discuss the current state of youth involvement in their individual counties and how to enhance it
- Brainstorm barriers to youth involvement
Youth United is a youth-led initiative who’s purpose is to support youth voice and youth involvement throughout CONNECTIONS (Wayne County System of Care).
Youth United Structure

Youth Involvement Coordinator

**East Region**
**Focus:** Leadership/Training
- Fiduciary/Adult Support - Black Family Development Incorporated
- Regional Youth Specialist
- Advocates
- Participants

**Youth Involvement Partner Agencies**
- Northeast Guidance Center
- Juvenile Assessment Center
- Ruth Ellis
- 3rd Circuit Court
- Gateway Detroit East
- Others

**Central Region**
**Focus:** Advisory/Committee
- Fiduciary/Adult Support - The Children's Center
- Regional Youth Specialist
- Advocates
- Participants

**Youth Involvement Partner Agencies**
- Southwest Counseling Solutions
- The Guidance Center
- KidsTALK
- Community Care Services
- ACCESS
- AHFS
- Arab American Chaldean Council
- Others

**Northwest Region**
**Focus:** Stigma/Social Marketing
- Fiduciary/Adult Support - Development Centers Incorporated
- Regional Youth Specialist
- Advocates
- Participants

**Youth Involvement Partner Agencies**
- Family Alliance for Change
- Starfish Family Services
- Hegira
- Starr Vista
- Lincoln Behavioral Services
- Others
Regional Breakdown

East Region
Training and Leadership

Central Region
Advocacy

Northwest Region
Stigma and Social Marketing
Definition of Youth Involvement

Youth Involvement (YI) is BIG PICTURE. It is a deliberate effort that centers on young people’s participation in personal, social, institutional, cultural, and other forms of action throughout society.
What is the Difference Between Youth Involvement (YI) and Youth Peer Support (YPS)?
The Difference

Youth Involvement

• Youth Involvement (YI) is BIG PICTURE. It is a deliberate effort that centers on young people’s participation in personal, social, institutional, cultural, and other forms of action throughout society.

Youth Peer Support

• Youth Peer Support (YPS) provides direct support, help build skills, and share information with young people living with a Serious Emotional Disturbance or a Developmental Disability.
What are some key components of Youth Involvement?
What is Communication?

Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one place to another.
The desired outcome or goal of any communication process is understanding.
Communications

To effectively communicate with youth we need to think about:

Content
Language
Channel
Timing
Style
Content

Bite Size Information
Imagery boosts engagement and should reflect the audience.

Easy-to-digest, ‘bite-size information’, means less relevant parts can be easily ignored.

Content that features contribution and input from young people/local community is appreciated.

Relevant to youth workers’ objectives with evidence.
Language

• Should be informal: grounded in real-life, easy to understand and conversational
  • Avoid acronyms, jargon
  • Avoid academic phrasing

• Use of young people’s terminology is appreciated as are direct quotes where appropriate

• Simple and straight to the point

• Humor goes a long way
Channel

Face to face
Email
Social Media
Word of Mouth
Timing

• Avoid scheduling meetings and events during school holidays.

• Make sure you send out reminders for youth to attend meetings. Emails are not always the best way to connect with youth.
Style

Clear objectives and outcomes

Simple to use and adapt to needs

Do not require a lot of additional materials

Young person friendly: use videos and other media to engage youth

Involving young people in early stages of design

Tailor by age of young person: activities for younger - younger need more structure, older more flexibility
Things to Remember

• Build Rapport
• Gain youth trust (actively listening)
• No Sideways Comments (ie. “shade”, “sarcasm”)
• Respect, Openness and Honesty
• Culturally Competent
• Judgement free Zone (No preconceived notions)
• Use social media and artistic expression to communicate with youth and meet them where they are
This is what we hear when you talk AT us and not TO us
What is Youth Engagement?

"Don't call me a teenager. From now on, I want to be referred to as a pre-adult."
What is Youth Engagement?

Youth engagement is the result when young people are involved in responsible, challenging actions to create positive social change.

This means involving youth in planning and in making decisions that affect themselves and others.
Youth engagement is linked to positive outcomes for young people, adults, agencies and communities.
Youth Involvement Questionnaire
Importance of Youth Engagement

• Youth have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them
• Youth aren't always getting the help they need
• Youth turn to their peers for support
• Adolescence is a critical time in development
• Peers are important partners in mental health promotion and stigma reduction
• Help develop life skills
• Leads to better health outcomes for young people, adults, agencies and communities
Principles of Youth Engagement

• Value youth as community assets
• Commit to sharing leadership
• Build authentic relationships
• Strive for health equity
• Use a whole community approach
• Meet youth where they’re at
• Put safety first
Youth Engagement Strategies

Create a youth friendly environment
Include youth in open communication in the workplace
Assign the youth a role
Meet us where we are and support us.
Create opportunities and platforms for youth to actively step up
Leave something behind for me to build upon
Trust me when you are not around
Ways to Engage Youth

• Youth Councils for youth, by youth

• Youth serving on boards: consumer council, fatherhood, wraparound, suicide prevention taskforce, etc.

• Adapting board times to integrate youth

• Intentional actions from adult supports: Help engage youth that need an extra push
# Benefits of Youth Engagement

## Benefits for Youth

- Opportunity to build leadership skills and gain experience
- Builds assets and protects against risky behaviors
- Gain understanding about the value of youth voice in their community
- Feel a sense of belonging and worth
- Develop positive connections to peers and adults
- Develops their resume
- Provides sense of accomplishment and affirms that they can make a difference

## Benefits for Adults

- Involve youth in decision-making (external)
- Recognize and acknowledge youth as vital contributors
- Changes how they perceive youth (breaks down stereotypes)
- Opportunity to enhance mentoring skills
- Re-energizes adults by learning about youths’ fresh perspectives
- Learn new skills from youth
- Gain insight into current youth culture

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Benefits of Youth Engagement for Communities

Develops youth leaders who become active in addressing community issues.

Increases understanding about and between generations of adults and youth.
Youth Engagement in Mental Health
Youth and Adult Partnerships

The essence of youth involvement is a partnership between adults and young people - one in which each party has the opportunity to make suggestions and decisions and in which the contribution of each is recognized and valued.

A youth-adult partnership is one in which adults work in full partnership with young people on issues facing youth and/or on programs and policies affecting youth.
Why aren't more organizations leaping to establish youth-adult partnerships?
How To Partner With Youth

• Treat youth as partners: ensure they have input and share in decision making.
• Welcome, encourage, and affirm contributions and insights from both youth and adults.
• Encourage everyone to recognize the mutual benefits of youth and adults working together in partnership.
• Establish high expectations for everyone involved.
• Provide training and build the capacities of both youth and adults.
• Include room for growth and advancement for experienced youth and adults.
• Take the time and make the effort to develop a good relationship with youth before expecting much.
• Remember that there are times when youth need to say, "No." Their education, relationships, communities, and extracurricular activities are important, too.
Barriers to Partnership

Youth as Objects

Youth as Recipients

Youth as Partners
How To Be A Partner With Youth

**Do’s**
- Accountability/honesty between both youth and adult partners
- Individualize each youth
- Positive reinforcement

**Don’ts**
- Don’t give up on youth when times get tough - use as a teaching moment.
- Don’t compare youth
- Don’t talk down to us
Scenario Activity: What Would You Do?
Questions
Contact Us

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Resources

- Read more at: https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/what-is-communication.html
- http://www.togethertolive.ca/youth-engagement
- http://www.yetoolkit.ca/content/importance-youth-engagement