

[CIP]Talk: Leveraging Lived Expertise to Create Systems Change Action Guide

Presenters: Jennifer Rhodes and Madison Sandoval-Lunn

Culture and Climate

- Lead with a belief and understanding that young people are organizational assets and can help us transform this system.
- Consider reciprocity in your engagement approach. Make sure that you're not just taking young people but they too are benefiting from the engagement.
- Recognize that engaging young people as an opportunity to empower them. This includes investing in their professional development.
- Assess bias and identify the root cause of disempowerment in the court system, partner with youth and families vetted organizations, and create goals for the court to mobilize empowerment.
- Provide a safe space to share views by acknowledging the power dynamics of being system involved by identifying families strengths from the beginning. Don't judge, don't fix. Validate and name their goals before moving to problem solving and assigning goals.
- Lead with compassion to youth and families while having humility that the system causes unintentional harm.
- Acknowledge that each step of growth should be celebrated and authentically engage those with lived expertise to ensure that the environment is one that supports authenticity, balances power, and does not value professional experience over youth and families in the plan for their life.

Resources

- Allocate financial resources to compensate folks with lived experience competitively for their time and expertise.
- Hire a person with lived expertise to serve as a peer navigator or support to help youth navigate complexity of the court systems and process.
- Build in intentional and appropriate amounts of time to level set. Make sure you provide context and allow young people enough time to prepare their thoughts, ideas and recommendations and not spring things on them at the last minute.
- Provide a bidirectional space of learning and partnership through having well supported lived experts who can rapport build, intentionally plan, and support the youth and families through engagement with the courts using their own voice.

Knowledge and Skills

- Provide training and support to make sure that young people have all of the information that they require to provide information about how the system can move forward.
- Spend the time to build a relationship, get to know their interest, skill, strengths, and find or create the right opportunity for them to be engaged.
- Ensure the person and the environment is trauma informed and situations are approached from a trauma informed perspective. Trauma can actually impair the processing of information and decision making, so make sure you work with the young person to assess the present situation, build in time to share information, and share information in a multitude of ways, including in written form and checking for understanding.

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Knowledge and Skills (cont)

- Understand the importance of adolescent brain development. The part of the brain that is responsible for things like abstract thoughts, ability to predict consequences of actions, and problem solving problems isn't fully developed until a young person is about 26 years of age.
- Be aware of adultism. Adultism is defined as behaviors and attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better or no better than young people, therefore are entitled to act upon young people without their agreement.

Infrastructure

- Make sure that feedback loops are built into environments. Take the time to ask young people for feedback but also provide them with feedback to support their professional development.
- Invest in positive youth development, young people can take on more leadership roles such as serving on decision making boards, leading workgroups as well as committees.

Additional Resources

[Children's Bureau Information Memorandum 19-03](#)

The purpose of this Information Memorandum (IM) is to demonstrate that family and youth voice are critical to a well-functioning child welfare system and to strongly encourage all public child welfare agencies, dependency courts, and Court Improvement Programs to work together to ensure that family and youth voice are central in child welfare program planning and improvement efforts.

[Methods and Emerging Strategies to Engage People with Lived Experience](#)

This brief identifies methods and emerging strategies to engage people with lived experience in federal research, programming, and policymaking. It draws on lessons learned from federal initiatives across a range of human services areas to identify ways that federal staff can meaningfully and effectively engage people with lived experience.

[Menu for Youth Engagement](#)

This guide explains the benefits of engaging youth voice in practice, peer support, and system-level change. It gives suggestions for how to use learning activities with the Authentic Youth Engagement Stories video series to suit different purposes and audiences and includes summaries of the youth stories and links to more in depth resources.

[Perspectives on Youth Engagement](#) (Learning Experience)

Provides information on how to engage youth and young adults in child welfare practice and how to use certain strategies to support youth engagement.

[Strategies for Authentic Integration of Family and Youth Voice in Child Welfare](#)

Discusses tips and strategies to effectively engage and sustain the involvement of families and youth at the agency level. Includes key tasks for authentic engagement, examples from the field and a tool of engagement with four primary ways to authentically engage youth and families.

[Youth Engagement Blueprint Series: Viewing Young People as Organizational Assets](#)

Explains the importance of sustained involvement of young people currently and formerly in foster care in meaningful organizational activity.