PARTNERING WITH YOUTH TO IMPLEMENT THE PRINCIPLES FOR CHANGE: ADDRESSING THE INTERSECTIONS OF YOUTH LEGAL SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT AND HOMELESSNESS

NATIONAL NETWORK FOR YOUTH IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COALITION FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE

NATIONAL NETWORK for YOUTH

COALITION FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE

Introduction

Systemic change cannot occur without the input from those who are most impacted by the systems. Partnering with youth with lived experience is vital to implementing the nine Principles for Change [1] as you work to address the intersection of youth legal system involvement and homelessness in your community. This resource provides tips and tools on partnering with youth to restructure policies and systems.

Consistent with the Principles for Change, partnerships with youth should prioritize LGBTQ+ youth, gender non-conforming (GNC) youth, youth of color, youth with disabilities, and other over-represented youth to address and reduce disproportionality. This is vital to transforming policies and practices to ensure that a youth's involvement with the legal system does not increase the likelihood they experience homelessness through improved reentry policies and practices, and that youth experiencing homelessness receive the services and support they need instead of being cited, arrested, charged, or incarcerated.

Sharing Power With Youth

Partnering with youth to implement the Principles for Change should never tokenize youth.[2] Instead, individuals, organizations, and initiatives should share power with youth with lived experience. Sharing power means youth and young adults are equal partners, and organizations are building youth's capacity and development in their interactions with youth. Organizations need to be intentional in how they develop young people as leaders. The goal of sharing power is to facilitate the healthy development of young people to eventually transfer that power.

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1   2022 Principles for Change: Addressing the Intersections of Youth Legal System Involvement and Homelessness. https://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/Principles%2520for%2520Change-3-compressed-2.pdf

2   Tokenism is when young people appear to be given a choice, but in fact they have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate. Source: http://tnoys.org/wp-content/uploads/YE-Ladder-One-Pager-2.pdf

How Sharing Power Looks in Practice

- Youth and young adults (YYA) are equal partners in the decision making processes.
- YYA are given paid opportunities for growth within organizations.
- YYA are provided with coaching and mentorship to develop their own skillset.

Youth-Adult Partnerships at the Individual or Micro Level

- Use honesty and confidentiality to establish and maintain trust.
- Offer choices or compromises and ask youth for suggestions and feedback.
- When negotiation with a young person is not possible, explain why.
- Be transparent by sharing information to the extent possible.
- Encourage and motivate, rather than coerce, youth participation in decision-making.

Developmentally-Appropriate Opportunities for Youth Voice and Choice

- Development of program rules and expectations.
- Safety planning, including identification of triggers, boundaries, and coping strategies.
- Exploration and defining of family and network of supportive relationships.
- Framing of youth's personal story.
- Day-to-day planning, including menu, activity, schedule, and attire planning.
- Larger decision-making, including medical decision-making, placement decision-making, and transition planning.

Preventing a Power Struggle with Youth

As soon as you notice the conversation becoming a power struggle, you can view it as an opportunity to practice your skills of:

- Remaining calm and focused.
- Avoiding negating the youth.
- Showing interest in what the youth is saying.
- Acknowledging what the youth says without necessarily agreeing with it.

Signs you might be getting into a power struggle:

changes in body language—crossing arms, hands on hips, and shaking of the head—are quick signs that either you or the individual you're speaking with are entering a power struggle.

Common Power Struggles Adults May Encounter with Youth

Knowing these common power struggles can help adults identify and respond appropriately to situations.

1 **Defending one's authority**
We need knowledge that we don't have all the answers, and sometimes, youth can bring in new and innovative ideas. We need to shift our perspective and see that YYA adds value to the discussion.

2 **Personal button pushing**
Personal-button pushing is done to elicit a reaction out of someone to get them to back down. We need to avoid pushing other people's buttons and also be aware of our own buttons that trigger a response from us.

3 **Bringing up history/irrelevant issues**
Often seen when we say, "we tried that last time". This creates a back-and-forth dialogue where people create a mental scorecard. Instead, bring the discussion back to the original topic at hand and focus on solutions.

4 **Making empty threats or issuing ultimatums**
When frustration sets in during a meeting/discussion, power struggles involving ultimatums quickly follow, and you might catch yourself saying, "Don't do THAT or else." Having a plan and anticipating frustrations is a way to minimize this power struggle.

Throughout the rest of this brief, we are going to be applying best practices to partner with youth with lived experience to each Principle for Change.

Partnering With Youth

Principle 1: Ensure that the laws and policies in your jurisdiction do not lead youth experiencing homelessness to be cited, arrested, or charged for survival acts or "quality of life" offenses.

Partnering with youth is critical to changing policies and practices that lead to youth experiencing homelessness being criminalized for acts that are committed to survive. An essential first step any initiative should take is to form a Youth Action Board (YAB) of youth with lived experience who were also involved with the police and court systems. These young people can best identify what policies and practices led to their involvement in the legal system and similarly, how that legal system involvement may have led to their homelessness.

Tips for Partnering with Youth in Community Change and Advocacy

- Community efforts to allocate and distribute funds and other resources should share power with youth with relevant lived experience.
- For example, local organizations engaged in planning to address homelessness should include youth who have lived experience with homelessness. Young people can participate by serving on advisory boards, helping with the annual Point-In-Time count and youth counts, reviewing and scoring funding applications, and more.
- Youth should also be involved in efforts to advocate at the local, state, and national levels for funding and policies to support youth experiencing homelessness. They should be involved in planning discussions around what funding and policy changes are needed, as well as in advocating for those changes (including testifying at hearings, making lobbying visits, etc.), and in policy implementation and evaluation.

> Youth Action Boards (YAB) can provide leadership and guidance in partnership with other key stakeholders. They should be paid and have a well defined structure.

Principle 2: Ensure that young people are diverted from legal system involvement whenever possible and that any diversion programs or services are appropriately tailored to meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

Young people experiencing homelessness should be referred by many stakeholders, inclusive of law enforcement, for housing and services they need. Youth in the court system should be diverted from formal involvement. Changing the policies and practices of law enforcement and the courts can be challenging. It can be easy to disconnect the challenges youth experiencing homelessness face and miss the need for help instead of punishment. Having youth as equal partners is critical to identifying what policies and practices need to change.

> Example: Wisconsin is currently working on "safe harbor" legislation that would prevent minors from being charged for prostitution. In states that have similar protections, human trafficking prosecutions and convictions have increased while young people are better able to access the protections and resources that they need and to which they should be entitled.

It is also important for youth with lived experience to educate law enforcement and court personnel about youth homelessness and how it leads some youth to be in situations where they encounter law enforcement or the courts. This is critical to changing the policies and building the buy-in needed to change policies and how they are implemented. Further, reentry policies for youth exiting the juvenile legal system should include access to safe and stable housing in order to prevent homelessness experiences.

Tips for Engaging Youth in Service Planning and Design

- Services and programming for youth should be developed through youth-adult partnerships to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of youth. This can be accomplished by facilitating opportunities for youth councils, youth advisory boards, and other groups of young people to participate in strategic planning and program design. Youth should be invited to participate from the beginning of the planning process and to "think big" about the services provided by the organization. By design, these youth councils should have real power.

- In addition to formal youth boards or councils, systems and organizations should actively hire youth with lived experience for their open positions. This further embeds lived expertise within organizations and systems as they work to become youth-centric and improve policies and systems.

- Youth should also be asked to weigh in on specific decisions about programming. These decisions may seem less crucial to the organization, but may be very important to youth. For example, ask youth what services or training they would like access to. Ask youth what they think the cell phone policy should be, explaining why it is in place.

- Services should be routinely evaluated via a continuous improvement process that includes youth feedback. For example, an organization might provide exit surveys to youth at the completion of services and or periodically facilitate interviews or focus groups with a sample of current or former youth clients.
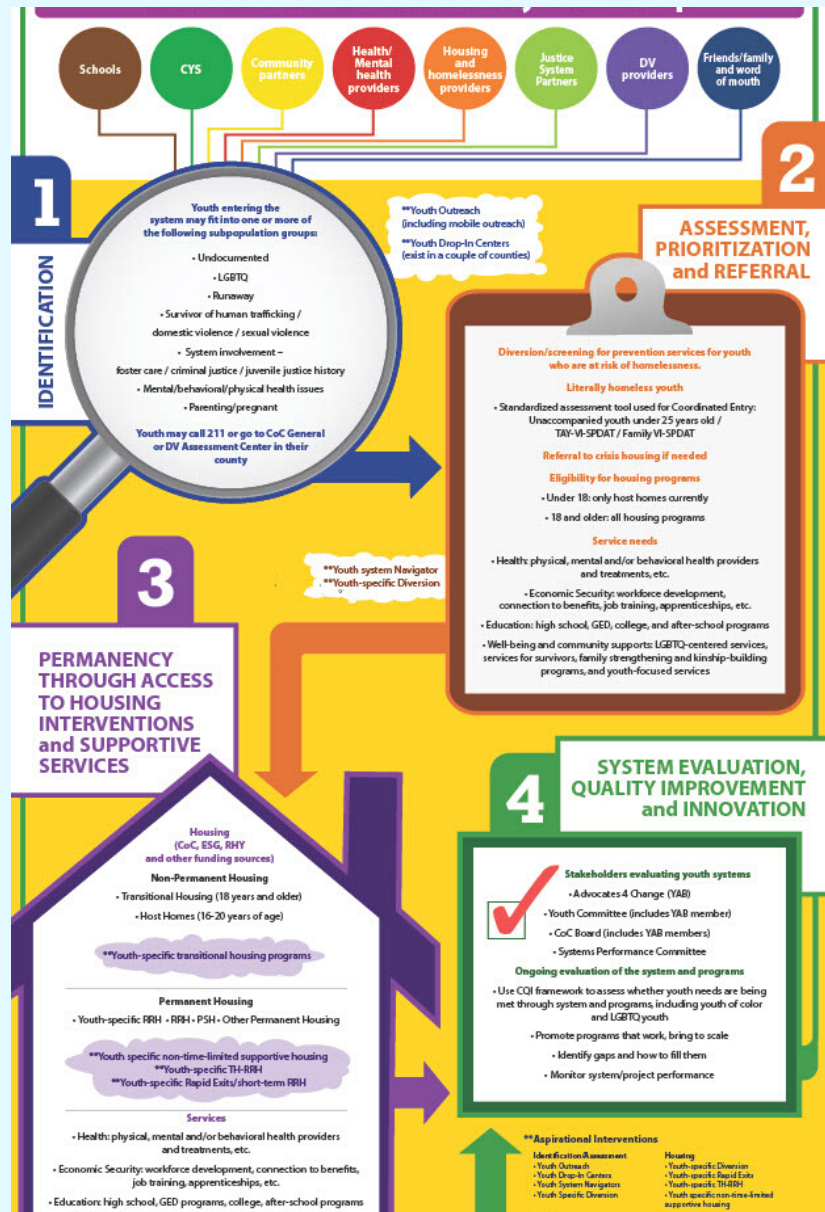
How to: System Mapping is a visual depiction of the key organizations and individuals that influence a topic, allowing insight into the players within a system. Communities can map out all the stakeholders who can provide support/resources to youth. This will allow YYA to be diverted away from the legal system and link with community resources.

Principle 3: When legal system involvement cannot be avoided, ensure comprehensive transition planning begins immediately after—and continues throughout—a youth's confinement or probation supervision.

Young people who have experienced homelessness and the legal system can best identify what young people need. In addition to partnering with youth with lived experience to design the services available to youth as part of transition planning, it is also effective to hire youth with lived experience as professionals who work with systems-involved youth to develop transition plans as well as help youth through their transitions. Young people with lived experience know what can be helpful or needed beyond a traditional social worker because they have been through it before.

Pro Tip: Transition planning begins at intake. We often think that transition planning has to happen close to discharge. This is FALSE. Discussions about transitioning (reentry) need to begin from day 1.

Tips for Engaging Youth in Service Provision

- Add transition-based questions at intake.
- Some youth have strengths that position them to be excellent supports for other youth clients, in roles such as mentor, peer navigator, or peer support specialist. Youth may also assist with life skills training, help other youth access services, employment, and job leads, and more.

- Young adults who completed services successfully can be excellent role models and motivators for youth who have less experience with your program. Think about what roles you can create for youth with lived experience within your organization as well as hiring youth with lived experience for any open position. Be sure you pay youth fairly for their contributions. Even roles such as cooking, cleaning, landscaping, and answering phones may be of interest to some young people looking for work.

Principle 4: Ensure your community has both long- and short-term safe housing options available for youth who are or have been, involved with the youth legal system.

Have your youth action board and youth with lived experience who may be on staff, your board, or otherwise engaged, actively involved in assessing the adequacy of existing housing options for youth and identifying the additional housing options needed. For example, a community may say, we have 30 available housing options for youth; this is adequate. But young people would push back on this and say, well, none of those housing options are for minors, and minor-aged youth need access to housing. Also, the youth may point out that one of the providers will not allow youth with a criminal background or those who are still on probation to enter any of their housing programs. This level of analysis is critical and identifies two critical issues: 1) a complete lack of housing options for minors; and 2) limitations in access to housing for youth with a criminal background.

Tips for Partnering with Youth to Develop Housing and Service Options:

- Youth housing providers must not be the only ones identifying what additional housing options are needed. Youth with lived experience should identify what housing is needed. The housing options young people identify should be a priority of the community to invest in and develop.
- In addition to identifying housing options that are needed, youth should identify how the existing housing options can improve, change, and provide supportive services and other needed resources.

> **How to**: Develop a community needs assessment to see what services are out there. Here is an example of a community survey (our survey questions that link to our proposed system).

Principle 5: Ensure your community provides youth and their families with related services and supports that can help them obtain and keep safe and stable housing.

Young people need access to supportive services, including employment and workforce development programs. LGBTQ+ youth with disabilities face particular challenges and discrimination. Supportive services can help youth overcome these barriers. Partnering with youth with lived experience is critical to ensure support services are provided to young people. Too often, communities assume these services are being offered, or community providers say they are providing those services. However, they cannot meet the needs of all youth or knowingly or unknowingly discriminate against certain youth populations.

Principle 6: Ensure that youth and their families are not kicked out of their homes or denied housing because youth have been arrested or adjudicated for a delinquency offense.

As discussed under Principle 4, youth with lived experience can best identify the barriers youth face when trying to access housing in the community. Too often, public housing authorities and other programs may have criminal background limitations on housing access. This policy is often created at the local program-level to reduce the cost of liability insurance--, for community-based providers can pay a lower insurance rate by imposing restrictions on residents of a program. Also, many landlords require criminal background checks and may prohibit residency or require higher deposit fees for those with criminal backgrounds.

Having young people at the table enables communities to move more rapidly to:

- Identify the barriers they encountered.
- Specify the limitations of specific housing providers/programs.
- Identify how much additional money is needed to implement the programs that youth need. (e.g. programs having money to pay higher insurance premiums to allow youth with criminal records into their program).

Principle 7: Ensure youth help lead and shape the identification and implementation of policy and practice solutions to address the connections between the youth legal system and youth homelessness.

This brief discusses the different ways you can partner with youth with lived experience to ensure that a youth's involvement with the legal system does not increase the likelihood they will experience homelessness. It also explains the importance of providing youth experiencing homelessness receive the services and support they need instead of being cited, arrested, charged, or incarcerated. What is critical is also to evaluate how you are partnering with youth to assess effectiveness, improve outcomes, and determine if the partnerships are truly sharing power with youth. The following are tools and rubrics that can be used to evaluate the implementation of youth-adult partnerships and or youth engagement.

- Organizational Assessment Checklist
  - The **Organizational Assessment Checklist** by Youth on Board helps assess whether your organization can engage youth in decision-making.
- Youth Engagement Readiness Worksheet
  - The **Youth Engagement Readiness Worksheet** by Free Child is another pre-assessment that addresses readiness for youth engagement.
- Youth Engagement Toolkit Evaluation Tool
  - The **Youth Engagement Toolkit Evaluation Tool** by the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development in Canada helps organizations rate their youth engagement practices and identify strengths and areas for improvement. The tool considers youth engagement practices across five domains:
    - Organizational readiness,
    - Youth-adult partnerships,
    - Youth leadership & decision-making,
    - Youth as evaluators and researchers, and
    - Diversity.
- Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric
  - The Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric by Michigan State University was developed based on research and aims to increase youth voice and youth leadership in affairs that affect youth and their communities. The rubric follows the framework found in "The Psychology and Practice of Youth-Adult Partnership" (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013) and evaluates youth-adult partnerships based on:
    - Authentic Decision-making,
    - Natural mentors,
    - Reciprocity, and
    - Community Connectedness.
- Youth Advocacy Toolkit
  - National Network for Youth's YAB Advocacy Toolkit provides all of the information YABs need to know about the policymaking process and effective advocacy strategies. In addition, this toolkit teaches you how to effectively build relationships with policymakers and influence their support of your policy recommendations. Finally, this guide also discusses strategies for youth sharing personal experiences while ensuring that youth choose what and how you share.

Tips for Evaluating Youth-Adult Partnerships and Sharing Power with Youth:

- Think of evaluation activities as facilitating continuous quality improvement. This means that evaluation activities should be ongoing rather than just at the end of a project, as the goal is to learn from evaluation results and make program adjustments.
- Include staff at different levels of your organization in the evaluation process, as well as youth.
- You can engage youth in evaluation activities by asking for their feedback via surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups, but also by including them in the review and analysis of data and the development and implementation of program recommendations.

Principle 8: Ensure that law enforcement, courts, schools, and service providers employ gender-responsive and age- and culturally-appropriate trauma-informed responses when working with youth.

While all adults who work with youth should have their best interest at the forefront, that is not how policies and practices are always shaped. Just as it is vital to have youth at the forefront of changing policies, they should also be central to changing practices at the day-to-day community level. This means engaging youth as collaborators in training front-line staff and community agencies who encounter and serve youth experiencing homelessness.

Young people who have experienced homelessness are the best educators and trainers of their experiences and needs. Like the Principles for Change details, youth who have experienced homelessness have experienced trauma and need trauma-responsive   and culturally and linguistically appropriate services   from all people and systems . All relevant front-line workers should receive annual training, at a minimum, and demonstrate competency in trauma-responsive and culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

For example, youth with lived experience could be contracted to provide training on Trauma-Informed Care as the National Network for Youth contracted with two youth with lived experience who are mentor-alumni of NN4Y's National Youth Advisory Council. Youth with lived experience can also include examples of how they didn't receive trauma-informed responses from law enforcement or the courts and the negative impact . They can also share examples of how receiving culturally competent services helped them exit homelessness. Sharing positive and negative examples can be effective training. [4]

Also, it is vital for those partnering with youth with lived experience to know that those youth have probably experienced trauma that may manifest itself in their work in the following ways:
- Difficulty concentrating;
- Flashbacks/preoccupation;
- Worrying;
- Memory disturbances;
- Near-constant ambivalence;
- Change in hygiene, sleeping, eating patterns;
- Social withdrawal or not wanting to be alone;
- Difficulty forming healthy relationships;
- Substance Use;
- Risky behavior.

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3   Trauma-responsive means looking at every aspect of an organization's programming, environment, language, and values, and involving all staff in better serving clients who have experienced trauma. Butler Center for Research. Moving to Trauma Responsive Care. (April 2021) available at https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/education/bcr/addiction-research/trauma-responsive-care

4   Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services are respectful of and responsive to the health beliefs, practices and needs of diverse clients. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. *Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services.* (January 2022) available at: https://www.ahrq.gov/sdoh/clas/index.html

Implementing the principles of trauma informed care can help to address the above and more:

Principles of Trauma Informed Care [5]	Definitions	Principles in Practice
Safety	Ensuring physical and emotional safety	Common areas are welcoming and privacy is respected
Choice	Individual has choice and control	Individual has choice and control
Collaboration	Making decisions with the individual and sharing power	Individuals are provided a significant role in planning and evaluating services
Trustworthiness	Task clarity, consistency, and interpersonal boundaries	Respectful and professional boundaries are maintained
Empowerment	Prioritizing empowerment and skill building	Providing an atmosphere that allows individuals to feel validated and affirmed with each and every contact at the agency

Principle 9: Undertake and fund research to help better understand the issue of youth homelessness and identify solutions.

Too often, the prevalence of and pathways into homelessness among youth in a community are unknown. Having comprehensive information about youth homelessness is critical to developing a comprehensive strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness. Research conducted in partnership with youth with lived experience is more likely to be comprehensive and reach more young people experiencing homelessness in that community.

Tips for Engaging Youth in Research:

- Participatory Action Research is a type of research that addresses challenges or inequities while studying them, typically by engaging those impacted by the issue being studied in study design and or implementation. Researchers who study youth are increasingly facilitating youth-adult partnerships through Youth Participatory Action Research methods.
- There is evidence that engaging youth as peer researchers has benefits both for the youth engaged and the research.

- Even if your organization is not a formal research institution, it may be appropriate to engage youth in organizational evaluation activities, such as designing and implementing surveys, facilitating focus groups, analyzing data, and or synthesizing findings. These activities may provide valuable information to guide organizational and community planning.

Conclusion

Any initiative focused on preventing and ending youth homelessness must include youth with lived experience, and share power with youth with lived experience. The ultimate goal is to transfer power to youth. To do so, adults must equip youth to use their power effectively within existing power structures. This means professional development. Adults can invest in the professional development of young people by serving as mentors and or by taking other active roles to facilitate and support youth success. We hope this resource helps you center and share power with youth with lived experience as you seek to transform policies and practices to ensure that a youth's involvement with the legal system does not increase the likelihood they will experience homelessness and that youth experiencing homelessness receive the services and supports they need instead of being cited, arrested, charged, or incarcerated.