

# NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US: Growing Meaningful Youth Involvement in Your Organization

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The Learning and Working During the Transition to  
Adulthood Research and Training Center

# Acknowledgements

The Transitions RTC aims to improve the supports for youth and young adults, ages 14-30, with serious mental health conditions who are trying to successfully complete their schooling and training and move into rewarding work lives. We are located at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA, Department of Psychiatry, Systems & Psychosocial Advances Research Center. Visit us at:

<http://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsRTC>

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# Workshop Overview

Part 1	Overview/Introductions
Part 2	Overview of meaningful youth involvement
Part 3	Effective Approaches for Engaging Young Adults
Part 4	Wrap-Up Discussion



# COURSE GOAL

- TO PREPARE SERVICE PROVIDERS TO BETTER SERVE YOUNG ADULTS WITH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONDITIONS



# Disclaimer

- Just our experience (what we have learned...)
- Different organizations envision youth engagement in different ways, there is no “one size fits all”, all have strengths and weaknesses
- Youth are heterogeneous – no “one size fits all” here either
- Youth Engagement is continuous– expect lots of trial and error
- Quotes used in this entire presentation: youth who wished to remain anonymous



# Learning Objectives

- ✓ Define ways youth can be meaningfully involved in different aspects of mental health work
- ✓ Identify and implement effective approaches to partnering with youth
- ✓ Identify common barriers and facilitators to youth involvement
- ✓ Learn how to overcome barriers to effective youth involvement
- ✓ Think of specific goals for involving young adults based on individual work

# PART 2: OVERVIEW OF MEANINGFUL YOUTH INVOLVEMENT



# Mechanisms of Youth Voice



1. Treatment planning/decision making



2. Peer Worker Roles



3. Systems & Service Change







# Fostering Youth Voice in Treatment Planning/decision making

- “Nothing about us without us”
- Important for self-determination skills
- Improves decision-making & planning skills
- Ensures treatment plan is culturally appropriate
- All models to increase youth voice in own care: respectful and value active listening

**Young adults are more engaged and committed to services & supports that they have an active voice in <sup>1, 2</sup>**



# Team Approaches

## Achieve My Plan <sup>3</sup>

- A structured process for implementing
  - Organizational commitment
  - Preparation for youth
  - During the meeting: meeting structures and interactions that promote youth participation
  - Mutual-Accountability

<http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/proj-3-amp>



# AMP Ground Rules

- ✓ Stick to the agenda (use the parking lot)
- ✓ Speak directly to each other, not about one another
- ✓ One person talks at a time
- ✓ Be respectful of everyone's voice and ideas
- ✓ AJAA - Avoid Jargon and Acronyms
- ✓ Focus on strengths and solutions
- ✓ End the meeting with everyone clear about commitments and next steps





# Fostering Youth Voice Through Peer Worker Roles



# Peer Support Workers

- People with lived experience providing services and supports directly to their peers
- Existing positions :“Peer Specialists”, “Peer Mentors”
- Near-age or same age, shared experience
- Group settings or 1-on-1
- Can mentor on various life skills/domains
- Utilized in a variety of settings: DMH, Hospitals, Drop-in Centers, etc.



# Why Peer Support?

- Research shows natural and near-age mentoring has positive effects
- Can increase social network
- Serve as a role model
- Instant credibility
- Recovery is a *shared* experience



# Example: Vocational Peer Mentors

- Test feasibility of adapted Individualized Placement and Supports (IPS)<sup>4</sup>:
  - Supported employment + supported education with the use of near-age vocational peer mentors
- Near-age peer mentors with SMHC, service experience and were HS grads with school/work history
- Thresholds Young Adult Program (YAP) in Chicago



# Vocational Peer Mentors

## Received 40 hours of training:

- Increase knowledge of IPS model
- Learn how to share story
- Build active-listening skills



## Role of Vocational Peer Mentors:

- Work closely with education/employment specialists
- Provide emotional support & validation
- Support young people in exploring work & school
- Model professionalism





# Value of Vocational Peer Mentors

## Valued Experiences:

- Receipt of advice
- Feeling related to & understood
- Opportunity to “talk” & be heard
- Trust & Safety

## Valued Characteristics:

- Strong, positive, honest, trustworthy
- Similar life experiences and ability to empathize

*“someone who was one of us... they can talk about their life, how they get through it and show us how to do it.” – Sam*





## 4. Partnering With Youth to Produce Systems & Service Change



## What is Systems Change?

"**Systems change**" is a shift in the way that a community makes decisions about policies, programs, and the allocation of its resources — and, ultimately, in the way it delivers services to its citizens<sup>7</sup>.



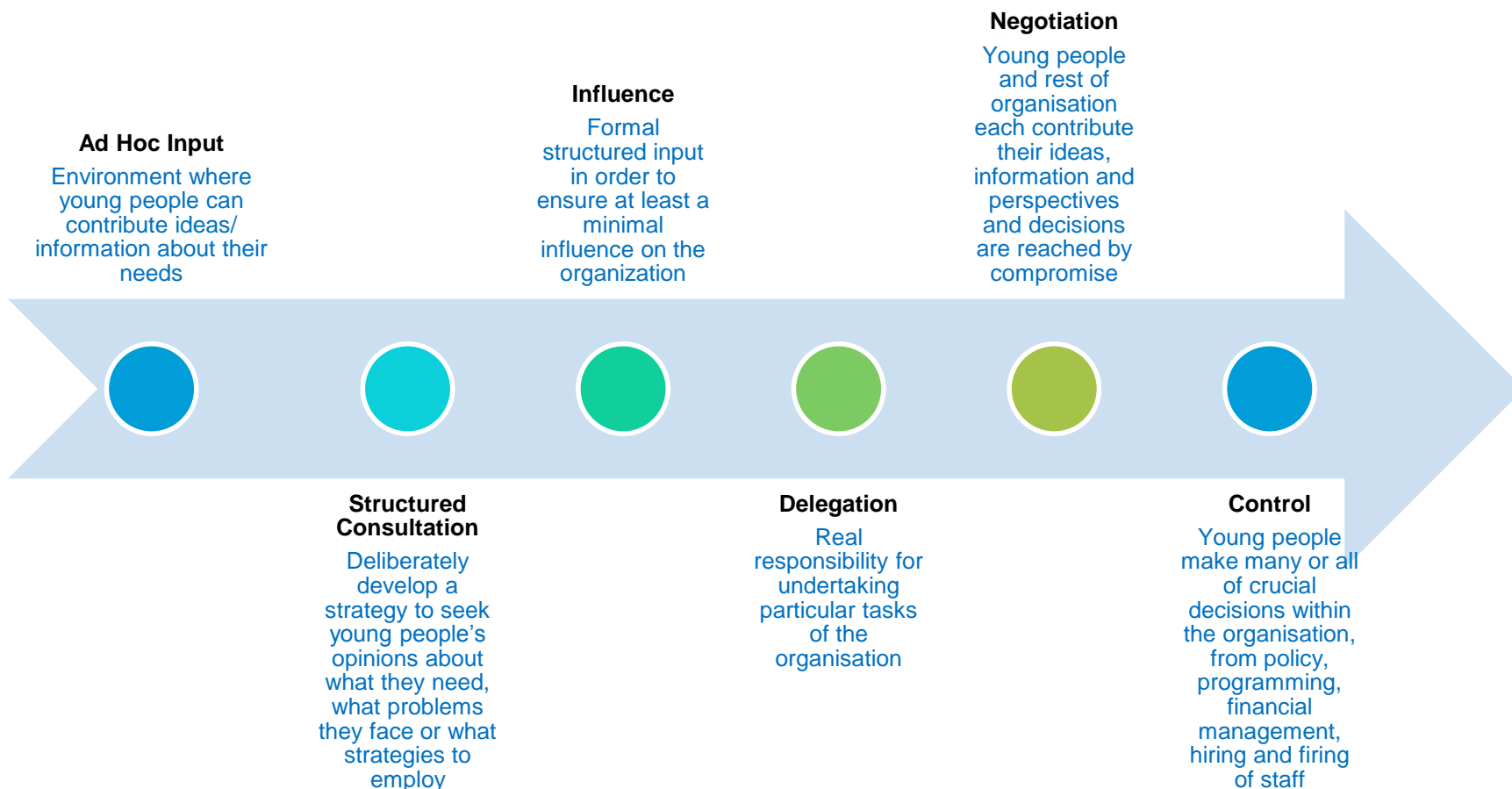
# Systems change

- Change systems to change the way a service is delivered to its target audience!
- Change underlying structures and supporting mechanisms

*“In Headstrong, we have young people participating at all levels including board level. We get expenses paid and accommodation if we need it. Things like that enable everyone to participate”- Laura*



# Continuum of Youth Involvement<sup>8</sup>



# Youth Council Involvement



DMH Statewide  
Youth Advisory  
Council

- Monthly young adult led meeting
- Reviews systems/services across MA to ensure young adult friendly/culturally appropriate
- Advocates for young adult voice in delivery and development



# PART 3: EFFECTIVE APPROACHES FOR ENGAGING YOUNG ADULTS

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# Effective Approaches



1. Paid vs. Unpaid Young Adult Roles



2. Preparing Your Team/Young Adults



3. Accommodations and Support



4. Employer Challenges







# 1. Paid vs. Unpaid Young Adult Roles

- Remuneration sends a message of appreciation for time and expertise
- Allows for ongoing learning opportunities
- Shift in organizational power
- Creates a career ladder vs. stagnant positions



# Paid Consultant vs Volunteer

- Should feel as if they can leave at any time
- Put strategies in place to ensure transition and continuity of work
- Encourage self-care, and importance of advocating for one's needs
- Re-assess position every few months
- Provide other incentives (resume building, trainings)



# Paid/voluntary

“[...] So to speak to the paid part: paying youth is a **discussion of equality**. The adults are usually paid by an organization to spend time working on a project. If a youth is volunteering they can't have as much say in it. When you ask someone to volunteer: understand that **you are on their time.**”- Mike





## 2. Preparing Your Team/Young Adults

- Ensure clarity across the organization on roles & responsibilities of young adult positions
- Establish levels of mental health disclosure required for being employed in YA positions
- Train staff on effectively working with YA staff



# Preparing Young Adults

- Provide thorough and comprehensive training
- Ongoing supervision & mentoring
- Support ongoing professional development
- Decide on mutually agreed upon strength-based roles
- Little things may not seem important to a “seasoned professional,” but can make all the difference to a young adult



# Genuine/Tokenism

- Having youth just to say you have youth
- Having one youth give feedback everything youth-related
  - One young person doesn't represent the voices of all young people
- All youth members should be approached equally for opinions and decisions

**Not willing to make changes:** “[...] When a group knows what they want to do, and they just want to check a box that says youth engagement so **they try and convince youth of their ideas rather than listening.**”



## 3. Accommodations and Support

A reasonable accommodation:

- A modification or adjustment to the work environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables a qualified person with a disability:
  - to perform the essential functions of that position.
  - to enjoy the same privileges and benefits of employment as are enjoyed by employees without disabilities



# Accommodations cont..

- Utilize existing resources and expertise (e.g. ADA, AskJan)
- Work together (employer and young adult)
- Quarterly review of request/flexibility



**Accommodations Worksheet:**

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Date of Request: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Name of Advocate (if you want one): \_\_\_\_\_
4. What specific Job Tasks that have been problematic/ overall issues you may be having in the workplace (DUE TO YOUR MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION/DISABILITY)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How are the Job tasks mentioned in #4 affected BY your mental health condition/disability?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Ideas for accommodations to address problems mentioned in #4:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. If you cannot think come up with accommodations to help address your difficulties, please list what resources you've used during your search so your supervisor doesn't use them when doing their own search (e.g. websites/people/products/etc):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Supervisor/Manager Comments:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signatures:

Signature of Employee \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Employee \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



# Considerations for Support

- Cost-effective process (short term pain for long term gain!)
- Formal vs. informal process
- Individualize, individualize, individualize!
- Consider coaching vs. supervision





## 4. Employer Challenges

- **Commitment from Human Resources**
  - Find a champion
  - Stress value of lived experience as a unique “qualification”
- **Commitment from all levels of organization**
  - Fear of “minimizing rigor”
  - Use examples to highlight value of youth voice



# Challenges and Solutions

Challenge      Employer Action      YA Action

Mismatch  
of cultures

Think outside  
the box;  
embrace  
differences  
as strengths

Showcase  
strengths; let  
your voice be  
heard

Lack of  
professional  
skills

Mentor; give  
constructive  
feedback; seek  
guidance

Seek out  
supports;  
take  
initiative



# Wrap-Up Discussion

- What do your goals look like?
- What resources will you look into moving forward?
- How can you keep up the stamina?



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# Thank You!

## Want More Information?

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Transitions RTC Website: [www.umassmed.edu/transitionsRTC](http://www.umassmed.edu/transitionsRTC)

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