

WELCOME TO TODAY'S TRAINING!

IS YOUR PROGRAM
DRIVEN BY THE VOICE
OF FOSTER YOUTH?

PRESENTED BY
LARRY ROBBIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ROBBIN AND ASSOCIATES

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WHAT THIS WORKSHOP IS ABOUT

- 1. We will get ideas about how to make our programs driven by the ideas and perspectives of foster youth so we can change our programs to provide better services to foster youth.**
- 2. We will get a better understanding of some of the barriers that keep our programs from being more driven by the voice of foster youth.**
- 3. We will learn about the three program models for serving foster youth so we can understand where our current model is on the continuum of models for serving foster youth and where we need to go to improve our work.**
- 4. We will work together to share ideas and best practices that will improve the capacity of our programs to be driven by the voice of foster youth.**

EXCHANGING BEST PRACTICE IDEAS

One thing I think programs could do to improve their ability to be driven by the voice of foster youth is to

1.

2.

OVERALL COMMENTS

- 1. The programs that serve foster youth are very diverse in their services, rules and regulations, cultures and goals. It is understood that not every idea we will discuss will work for every organization. Some ideas can be customized to work for some organizations, while others will not be a fit for certain programs.**
- 2. When we talk about being driven by the voice of foster youth, this does not mean that adults do not have important roles to play in improving the lives of foster youth.**

But historically our services have been driven much more from adult perspectives than foster youth perspectives.

We need to change that dynamic in order to better serve foster youth.

3. As we work to make our programs driven by the voices of foster youth, it is important that we understand, appreciate and respect why it may be difficult for some foster youth to provide input into improving the services offered to them. What causes this to happen?

A. Because of the impact of long term discrimination and various forms of oppression some foster youth may not feel that they have a voice or that their voice will matter even if they share their ideas.

B.

C.

If adults want programs to be driven by the voice of foster, we have to work with foster youth to overcome the forces that limit their voice.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING DRIVEN BY THE VOICE OF FOSTER YOUTH?

- 1. The program will be shaped by what youth want and not just by what adults think they need, so the services will be more meaningful for foster youth. This will increase the degree of engagement with the services and that will lead to better outcomes for the foster youth.**
- 2. If the program has to recruit foster youth, the more satisfied the current program participants are with the program, the more they will recruit foster youth to the organization.**
- 3. Engaging foster youth in improving the program will add to their personal growth and skill development in a variety of areas.**
- 4. The voices and experiences of foster youth will bring new creative ideas to improve our programs. This will reduce adult staff burnout and turnover because staff and management will not be working alone to try and figure out the answer to every program challenge.**

HELPFUL CONCEPTS

- 1. One of the biggest barriers for adults that design and work in programs that serve foster youth is adultism.**

Adultism is composed of things adults (even very well meaning adults) can do or think that inadvertently oppress and in some cases harm youth to varying degrees.

Adultism can be either major transgressions or microaggressions which are small, but powerful things that hurt youth and limit their voice in some way.

Adultism is an ism just like racism or sexism.

Adults need to acknowledge adultism and work to identify and eliminate it. Adults need to reduce its negative impact in order to be successful in serving foster youth. The more progress you make with adultism, the more successful you will be at making your program driven by the voice of foster youth.

EXAMPLES OF ADULTISM

- 1. Adults design policies and programs for foster youth without any meaningful input and direction from youth. Youth have a saying, “nothing about us without us” that is often not followed in the foster youth field.**
- 2. Some adults look at foster youth primarily from a deficit perspective in terms of their problems, what they do wrong or do not know instead of from a strengths based perspective that recognizes and enhances what youth do right and what they know.**
- 3. Some adults are always in teacher mode and do not make themselves the students of the foster youth they serve.**
- 4. Sometimes there is an over reaction to becoming driven by the voice of foster youth. In the name of not trying to oppress youth, some adults abandon their role in youth development and do not appropriately teach, mentor and support the foster youth.**

**WHAT ARE SOME OTHER EXAMPLES
OF ADULTISM IN PROGRAMS
THAT SERVE FOSTER YOUTH?**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

FOSTER YOUTH PROGRAM MODELS

FOR YOUTH MODEL	WITH YOUTH MODEL	PARTNER MODEL
<p>Youth are served by a program designed, run and driven by adults.</p> <p>There is no input from youth and no power sharing.</p> <p>The model is very top down in the sense that it “takes care of foster youth.”</p> <p>The program may have recruitment and retention challenges.</p> <p>The program tends to stagnate because of a lack of creative input from youth.</p> <p>It may meet its goals, but it does not develop youth.</p>	<p>The model is adult driven, but informally adults listen to what youth have to say.</p> <p>Some aspects of the program may be influenced by youth feedback.</p> <p>There are no structures in place to consistently get youth input and guidance.</p> <p>Youth may be in positions of responsibility, but they have no truly influential roles.</p> <p>There is no youth leadership development.</p>	<p>The roles of teacher and student go back and forth between youth and adults.</p> <p>Adultism is recognized and worked on.</p> <p>The youth voice is consistently solicited and put to use through formal structures and practices in as many aspects of the program as possible. The youth voice is a driver of the program.</p> <p>Youth feel a sense of power and ownership of the program along with adults.</p> <p>Youth leadership development is a priority.</p>

**WHERE IS YOUR PROGRAM
ON THE MODEL CONTINUUM?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
For Youth With Youth Partners

What do you need to do to go to a higher level?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

SOME OPTIONS FOR BECOMING A PARTNERSHIP MODEL

- 1. Form a foster youth leadership body by asking for volunteers or holding an election. Have youth decide on its structure and goals. Give it a budget and encourage youth leaders to take an active role in improving the program.**
- 2. If possible have youth involved in some way in the selection process of program participants, the hiring of staff and in the development of the services.**
- 3. On an ongoing basis, ask youth in your program and youth that have been in your program how to make the program more foster youth friendly and driven by their voice. Use focus groups, interviews, surveys and a suggestion and response tool.**
- 4. Look for other organizations working with foster youth to see if you can find ones that are better than yours at being driven by the voice of foster youth and learn from them.**

BARRIERS TO IMPROVING BEING DRIVEN BY THE VOICE OF FOSTER YOUTH

- 4 = This is definitely not a barrier for us
3 = This may or may not be a barrier for us
2 = This will be a barrier for us
1 = This will be a major barrier for us
n/a – this does not apply to us

- 1. Our program is stuck in tradition and has not changed very much and this is too big of a change for us.**
- 2. Our leadership has too much adultism and will be resistant to this change.**
- 3. We would like to do this, but we lack the expertise about how to move forward.**
- 4. We have some people that will want to make this change, but others will not. It will be difficult to get everyone on board with it.**

**SIGNS YOUR ORGANIZATION
IS BECOMING MORE DRIVEN BY THE
VOICE OF FOSTER YOUTH**

- 1. If you recruit youth, you are having fewer problems recruiting youth.**
- 2. Attendance and punctuality are improving.**
- 3. Your drop out rates are getting lower.**
- 4. There are brand new program developments that came from the ideas of foster youth.**
- 5. There are specific program challenges that have been solved by foster youth.**
- 6. There are fewer complaints about the program from foster youth and their attitudes about the program have changed.**
- 7. People in other programs tell you they are hearing more good things about your program.**
- 8. Your overall outcomes are improving because youth are more engaged and helping to solve the program's challenges.**

THINGS I WANT TO REMEMBER
FROM TODAY'S TRAINING