Essentials of Youth Engagement for Student Success
Bill Wilson Center Overview

- Founded in 1973
- Youth Shelter opened in 1977
- THPP, THP+FC, and THP+AC programs all emphasize post-secondary education
Involving young people in the creation of their own destinies

How would you define youth engagement in your work setting? How do you know a young person is engaged? What does that look like?
A Question for Reflection

What gets in the way of youth engaging with a service provider?

What are the barriers or obstacles that come between a young person accessing services or seeking the help they need to be successful in school?
Engagement 101

- Be Your Authentic Self
- It’s OK to not have all the answers
- Demonstrate genuine interest and curiosity
- Don’t make assumptions about what one knows how to do
- Let your client teach YOU something
- Prove early on that you do what you say you will do. Prove you are worthy of their trust
- Provide concrete tangible support in the first meeting.
The Importance of Authenticity

- We provide the most assistance when a young person is comfortable enough to share the obstacles they are actually facing. This requires tremendous vulnerability on their part.
- Sharing personal details within the bounds of professionalism is important in making connections and creating comfort.
- If You are not YOURSELF, the client will not be theirs either and may tell you what you want to hear or nothing at all.
The Pitfalls of Being Too Professional

- If a client whose life is falling apart sees a service provider who always appears to have “everything together” it creates a barrier to trust.
- If you are “perfect” at your job, how can a young person relate a struggle they are having?
- Sharing personal challenges or disabilities invites a student to do the same.
Demonstrate Genuine Interest

- What kind of music do you like?
- Are you a Niner fan?
- How are you liking that art class you’re taking?
- What’s a good show to binge-watch on Netflix this weekend?
When you ASSUME....

- According to The Literacy Project, there are currently 45 million Americans who are functionally illiterate, unable to read above a 5th grade level, and half of all adults can’t read a book at an 8th grade level.
- In California, 25 percent of the state’s 6 million students are unable to perform basic reading skills.
- Handing a student a form to complete without consideration of their literacy level could result in frustration and giving up.
- Students who are struggling academically often do so silently rather than risk feeling “stupid.”
- How can you create an environment where a student feels completely safe and comfortable to let you know they’re “stuck” or don’t understand something?
The Student is the Expert of Their Own Life

- Listen MORE, Talk LESS
- Opportunities where the student is the expert on something bring a sense of equity which expands a student’s comfort level in receiving aid or support
- Consider yourself a partner equally invested in the student’s success rather than their rescuer.
- Build on existing strengths and past successes to build motivation
Building Trust is Essential

- If you make a promise to do something and fail to follow through, you’ve lost that student.
- Only make promises you know you can keep.
- Find something tangible you can do for that student early on to demonstrate you will come through for them.
- Bill Wilson clients consistently say that once a service provider did something concrete for them, they knew they actually cared.
- Trauma survivors need predictable consistency from service providers.
Have snacks, water, and hygiene items available for students in your office or work setting.

Is there a place a student can obtain clothing, take a shower, do laundry, or other basic necessities on campus or near your work setting?

Offer school supplies, backpacks, a place to charge a phone, and any other student items you are able to.
Peer to Peer Interaction is POWERFUL

- Look for ways peer mentors or youth advocates can be incorporated into the program at every level.
- Involve service recipients in leadership decisions wherever possible.
- Consider creating a student advisory board specific to your program.
Results from a BWC Focus Group

Reflecting on someone who genuinely helped you at some point in your education, what allowed you to trust or know that you could open up to them?

- “Someone helping pinpoint the problem that prevents someone from learning.”
- “Checking-in, making sure everything is okay.”
- Someone with a past experience similar to their experience, 9 (14) youth stated this
- Someone straight forward
- Empathetic
- Someone reliable with follow-through
Results from a BWC Focus Group

Why do you think young adults in college don’t always utilize the help or resources available to be successful in school?

- They don’t know about the resources.
- There are requirements that aren’t applicable to youth.
- Lack of self-interest/self-motivation to seek resources.
What do you wish service providers would know or do differently when trying to help students be successful?

- Factor in short-term and long-term considerations.
- Not every student knows their resources or things about the school.
- Have lists of information.
- Know how to approach situations.
- Asking individual what they need in order to succeed
- Show interest in the person
- Need follow up
If you could design the ideal service provider to help foster youth in college, what would they be like? How would they act around students and what would they do to ensure everyone they worked with experienced success?

- Have a fairy Godmother
- Stay committed
- Help knowing how to navigate barriers: having car, needing gas (Help with daily life)
- Rules and Regulations
- Know the rules and regulations of the county they live in
- Someone who is considerate and knowledgeable about foster youth and homeless youth
- Someone who has experience working with youth
- Utilize Positive Reinforcement
- Positive person
- Encouraging
- Reliable
- Ensure success by saying what they’re going to do and follow through with it – “not sugar coat”.

Results from a BWC Focus Group
www.acouchisnotahome.org
Thank you!

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