

# TIPS AND TRICKS TO DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCILS IN MENTAL HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS

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# Acknowledgements

Our mission is to promote the full participation in socially valued roles of transition-age youth and young adults (ages 14-30) with serious mental health conditions. We use the tools of research and knowledge translation in partnership with this at risk population to achieve this mission. Visit us at:

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

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# Who are we?

## **National Center that aims to:**

- Improve supports for the successful completion of schooling and movement into rewarding work lives among young people, ages 14-30, with serious mental health conditions (SMHC)

## **How do we do that?**

1. Conduct research that supports the employment and education goals of YA
2. Develop and translate knowledge to the public
3. Infuse Participatory Action Research (PAR) into all ACR activities



# Objectives for this Workshop

1. Describe how engaging young adult voice can benefit you

2. Identify the successes and challenges of facilitating a Youth Advisory Board (YAB)

3. Review two published products on how to successfully organize and facilitate a youth advisory council



# Youth Advisory Councils: History in the Making

- Developed to provide *meaningful* opportunities to have a voice in decisions on resources, policies and services for this age group.
- Councils run by and for YA themselves, with “silent” support of staff/organizations
- YA develop recommendations and present written and oral history to policy makers, providers, professional organizations



# A Massachusetts Case Study!

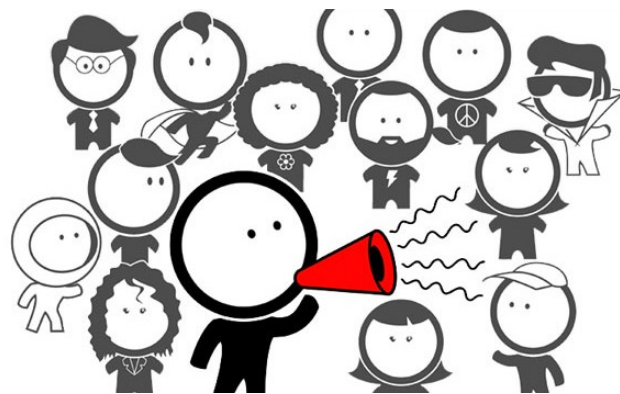
As **leaders** and **members** of local and national Young Adult Advisory Councils, we advise policy makers, service providers and family members on making mental health services and supports youth friendly, and foster hope in recovery.

- 100% Young Adult Led
- Safe space to build leadership skills
- Structured web based trainings
- Individualized support



# Why We Believe in Young Adult PAR?

- **Recognizing Unique:** needs, goals, values
- **Enhanced Young Adult focus:** Ensures services are YA friendly and culturally appropriate.
- **Increased engagement:** YA are more engaged (higher retention) and committed (lower premature dropout) to services they have an active voice in.
- **Pathway to:**
  - ✓ Better quality of care
  - ✓ Greater cost efficiency
  - ✓ Improved population health



# What's in it For the Young Adults?

## ❖ Education:

- ❖ Decision-making skills
- ❖ Vocational and skills development (resume builder!)
- ❖ Self advocacy /Self efficacy instilling empowerment

## ❖ Reduction of stigmatization.

## ❖ Relationship Building (professionally and socially)

## ❖ Increased self-confidence

## ❖ Greater likelihood of life long civic participation





# BUILDING A YOUNG ADULT ADVISORY BOARD

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The Transitions ACR Experience



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# The Young Adult Advisory Board

- Formed from a desire to include YA voice directly into our work.
- Formed because we recognized the importance of partnering with youth in our research efforts.
- YAB is often used to provide youth-minded feedback on:
  - Structure
  - Content
  - Language



# YAB History

- Created to provide input on the new Transitions ACR grant application in September 2014.
- First pre-grant YAB call- April of 2014.
- Initially- calls 2x/month.
- Since it's inception:
  - Reviewed over 8 tip sheets
  - Reviewed over 10 research projects
  - Reviewed projects from over 12 colleagues



# YAB Structure

- Meets virtually on a monthly basis using zoom software.
- Calls are 2 hours long
  - Two 40-45 minute sessions
- 10 minute break between the 2 sessions and time to check-in and wrap up before and after the call.



# YAB Members

- Nine members representing varying lived experiences:
  - ✓ Foster Care System
  - ✓ LGBTQ+
  - ✓ Criminal Justice System
  - ✓ Demographic diversity
- Membership requirements:
  - Be a youth/young adult with a serious mental health condition
  - Within ages 14-30
  - Interested in learning how to share expertise



# Facilitating the YAB Calls

- YA staff are funded to co-facilitate and oversee YAB activities.
- Members receive reminder emails in the week before the call
- Responsibilities of the co-facilitators include:
  - ✓ Training members
  - ✓ Coordinating speakers for the calls
  - ✓ Developing content for calls
  - ✓ Facilitating member participation
  - ✓ Processing invoices



# Engagement Strategies

**Icebreaker: If you could invite any 3 people from history (past or present) to a dinner party, who would they be? Why?!**



# Member Expectations

- Commitment = 6-month membership
  - We check in with them twice a year to see if they are interested in renewing their membership.
- Compensation: \$30/hour for their time
- Role Expectation:
  - Join at least 4/6 calls per 6-month membership
  - Actively engage, speak up, send emails
  - Support peers, support self





# YAB Member Experiences

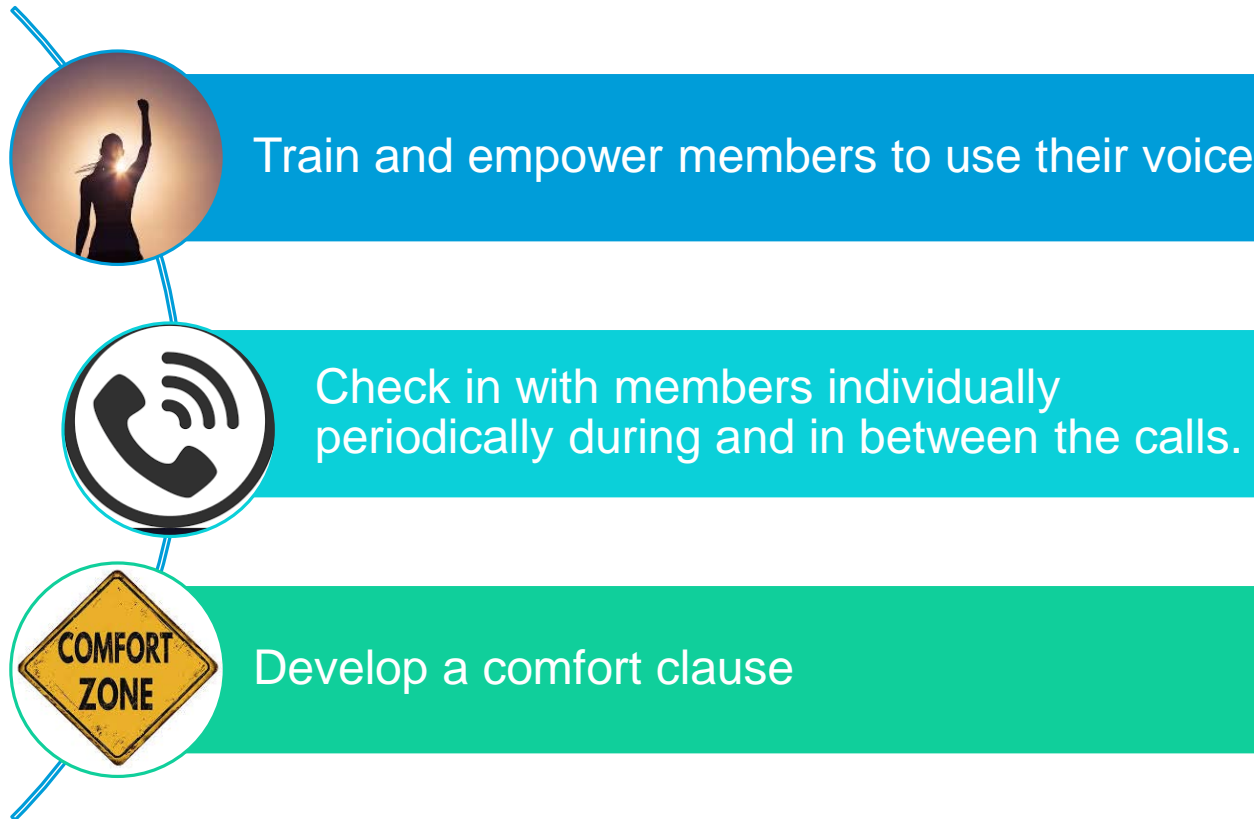
*“I can give advice to those who need it, those who have lived experience might need those services and you can find out about resources from other members”*

*“Being able to learn from other people, you can take that knowledge and grow from that and garner life experience”*

*“Because we are all from different areas, we can all see the different perspectives of people from around the country”*



# Balancing the Diversity of the Group



# Possible Struggles of Involving YA in Councils

## ❖ Trust issues between:

- ❖ Lived Experience vs. Non-Lived Experience

- ❖ Young Adult vs. Adult

- ❖ Staff lack of understanding of YA population needs

## ❖ Access:

- ❖ Accommodations/Transportation

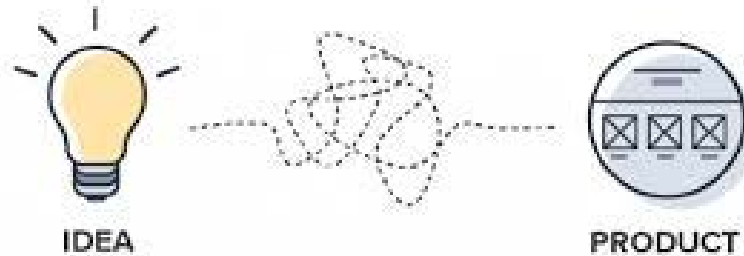
- ❖ YA lack of experience and training (advocacy)

- ❖ Language: lingo and acronyms

- ❖ Constant Transitions

- ❖ Time Commitment





# GETTING CONCRETE: CREATING YOUNG ADULT LED PRODUCTS

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# Tips and Tricks to Starting a Young Adult Council

- Co-written with YAB members
- Built from knowledge gained from facilitating council activities
- YAB members previously co-created tip sheets on the benefits of the ABLE Act.
- Based on input we received from the members, we decided to break up this topic into 2 parts:
  1. 10 Steps to Starting a Young Adult Advisory Council
  2. The Do's and Don'ts of Young Adult Councils



# Part 1: 10 Steps to Starting a Young Adult Advisory Council

**Purpose:** Targeted at readers who want to start a youth advisory council but don't know where and how to get started

**Format:** YAB member feedback led to format of describing this process within 10 steps or tips!

**Length:** Two pages of information, quick “start guide” not comprehensive product



# Steps 1 & 2

## Step 1: Top Down & Bottom Up Buy-In

- Leaders & staff must believe in purpose and value of council
- Provide training from top-down to ensure expectations align

## Step 2: Establish mission, vision & goals

- Outline primary (short-term) and secondary (long term) goals
- Develop a mission & vision of council as well



# Steps 3 & 4

## Step 3: Plan Council Meeting Times

- Try to accommodate young adult schedules
- Poll YA's for best times if possible

## Step 4: Set a Positive Meeting Location

- Have your meeting in a welcoming space
- Consider a meeting on a public transit route or providing transportation stipends





# Steps 5 & 6

## Step 5: Recruit Members

- Have a written description of member's roles/responsibilities
- Consider multiple advertising venues

## Step 6: Train Members and Invited Speakers

- Hold a training call/meeting for new members
- Educate and adult guests/speakers on how to be silent supporters



# Steps 7 & 8

## Step 7: Develop a Meeting Structure

- **\*\*Create a comfort clause\*\***
- Develop an agenda

## Step 8: Running The Meeting

- Identify facilitator/s
- Poll for feedback on the mission/vision of the council
- Make it fun!



# Steps 9 & 10

## Step 9: Develop Engagement Strategies

- Provide guidance and positive feedback
- Provide consistent reminders
- Membership renewal

## Step 10: Talk the Talk

- Showcase how feedback was incorporated by showing the final product



# The Do's and Don'ts of Young Adult Councils

DO



DON'T



Create the space for a 100% young adult led meeting



Assume that young adults cannot run their own meeting

Provide a space for older adults to attend meetings as “silent supporters”

Have more older adults in the room than young adult members



# The Do's and Don'ts of Young Adult Councils

| DO  | DON'T             |
|--|--|
| Provide a flexible attendance policy   | Develop unreasonable attendance policies for members   |
| Provide training and guidance for new members to flex strategic sharing skills       | Pressure young adults into providing feedback or disclosing their own mental health                  |
| Provide compensation for expertise   | Forget to show the members the value of their expertise and the changes made based on their feedback |



# Main Take-A-Ways

## Young Adult Advisory Boards

-Promote a national  
diverse youth voice

-Improve and educate the  
MH community

-Generate discussions,  
action plans and

## Staff and Members

- Better able to empathize  
with life as a young adult

- Awareness of  
community  
resources/supports

- Members gain  
professional experience



# Want more information?

## Email us!

Rafe: [Raphael.Mizrahi@umassmed.edu](mailto:Raphael.Mizrahi@umassmed.edu)

Amanda: [Amanda.costa@umassmed.edu](mailto:Amanda.costa@umassmed.edu)

## Check out our website:

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

Join our mailing list: <http://tinyurl.com/hkyf76l>



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