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

Raphael Mizrahi, B.S., Amanda Costa, B.S.

Transitions to Adult Center for Research
University of Massachusetts Medical School – Worcester, MA
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

Contents of this presentation were developed under grants from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research and from the Center for Mental Health Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services (ACL grant number 90RT5031). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this presentation do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HHS, and/or SAMHSA and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.
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.
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

The Transitions ACR Experience
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

- Train and empower members to use their voice
- Check in with members individually periodically during and in between the calls.
- Develop a comfort clause
## Possible Struggles of Involving YA in Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust issues between:</th>
<th>Access:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lived Experience vs. Non-Lived Experience</td>
<td>Accommodations/Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Adult vs. Adult</td>
<td>YA lack of experience and training (advocacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff lack of understanding of YA population needs</td>
<td>Language: lingo and acronyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constant Transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time Commitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GETTING CONCRETE: CREATING YOUNG ADULT LED PRODUCTS
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO</th>
<th>DON’T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create the space for a 100% young adult led meeting</td>
<td>Assume that young adults cannot run their own meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a space for older adults to attend meetings as “silent supporters”</td>
<td>Have more older adults in the room than young adult members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The Do’s and Don’ts of Young Adult Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO</th>
<th>DON’T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide a flexible attendance policy</td>
<td>Develop unreasonable attendance policies for members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide training and guidance for new members to flex strategic sharing skills</td>
<td>Pressure young adults into providing feedback or disclosing their own mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide compensation for expertise</td>
<td>Forget to show the members the value of their expertise and the changes made based on their feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
Amanda: Amanda.costa@umassmed.edu

Check out our website:
http://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/

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