TIPS AND TRICKS TO STARTING A YOUNG ADULT COUNCIL

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Objectives for this Workshop

1. Describe how youth councils voice can help:
   a) Promote a national diverse youth voice
   b) improve and educate the mental health community and beyond

2. Describe successes and challenges of facilitating a national youth council to infuse meaningful youth input into service delivery and development

3. Identify concrete tools for authentically infusing national youth voice in diverse organizations
The mission of the Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research 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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What is the Transitions ACR?

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 activities
What are Youth Councils?
Youth Advisory Councils: What are they?

• Developed to provide young adults with a meaningful opportunity to have a voice in decisions made about resources, policies and services for this age group.

• Councils run by and for young adults, with “silent” support of facilitators/organizations (Martin et al., 2007)

• Young adults provide feedback and develop recommendations to make youth research/services more young adult-friendly
How Would a Youth Council Benefit Your Organization?

• Generates discussions, action plans and solutions that are most relevant to YA daily lives, needs and preferences as members:
  • Share their opinions about what is relevant for people of their age group and background
  • Ensure treatment and research practices are culturally appropriate.

• Staff education:
  • Staff gain a sensitivity toward life as a young adult with mental health issues
  • Staff are made aware of community resources/supports
  • Staff have an opportunity to engage with young adults respectfully

• Provides opportunity for collaboration across organizations, states, and systems
Member Benefits of Youth Councils: Fostering Youth Voice

• Young adult members:
  • Gain an expertise on themselves as individuals (personal experience);
  • Feel validated by telling their story and seeing that their opinion is valued

• Members gain experience in research/service development
  • Research has shown that young adults are more likely to engage in services/supports they have had an active voice in! (Kirby et al. 2003; Oliver et al. 2006)

• Opportunity to practice professional development

• Members gain an ability to use their lived experience for a constructive purpose and learn to tell their story effectively
  • This helps them gain mental health literacy which is great because research has shown that as young adults gain mental health literacy, they become more likely to seek out services (Rickwood et al. 2005).

• May help reduce stigma surrounding mental health within the council and in the larger community
Examples of Advisory Councils

- Massachusetts’ DMH Statewide Youth Advisory Council (SYAC)
- MHE & YOU Advisory Council at SPARC
- Delaware Statewide Youth Advisory Council
- The Youth Advisory Board
WHAT IS THE YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Who</strong></th>
<th>Young adults with mental health conditions ages 14-30 from diverse backgrounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What</strong></td>
<td>All research and dissemination activities at the Transitions ACR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When</strong></td>
<td>Monthly for 2 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Where</strong></td>
<td>Virtual/Online Meeting Platform (Go to meeting/Zoom)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diversity in the YAB

- Depression
- Bipolar-Disorder
- African-American
- Eating-Disorder
- Adoption
- Arizona
- Multi-ethnic
- Residential-Work
- Clubhouse
- Arizona
- Christian
- Hospitalization
- College
- Inner-City
- Child-Services
- YouthMOVE
- New-York Counseling
- Stigma-Fighting
- Parent
- Trauma
- Foster-Care
- Advocacy
- Counseling
- Kentucky
- Family
- Maryland
- Educating
- Latino
- Research-Experience
- New-Mexico
- Connecticut
- Social-Work
- Quebec
- ActiveMinds
- LGBTQIA
- Massachusetts
- Psychosis
- Peer-Mentor
- Graduate-Program
- Domestic-Abuse
- High-School
- Advocacy
- Therapy
- Anxiety
- Rural
- California
- Psychology
- Kentucky
- Social-Work
- Connecticut
- Domestic-Abuse
- Family
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- LGBTQIA
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- Graduate-Program
How We’ve Benefitted from YAB involvement

- More authentic/rich interviews
- Stronger tip sheets and knowledge sharing materials
- Benefits in engaging youth research participants
- Stronger connection to media/technology
- Strengthened relationship with local and national mental health community
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”
YAB Member Roles/Expectations

• Provide feedback on research and knowledge translation activities

• **Disclosure Expectations:** members are **encouraged** to share details about their personal mental health lived experience in presence of a small audience if they feel comfortable but are **not required** to share

• **Attendance Expectations:** 6 month commitments
  • Joining 4/6 calls in any given 6 month period
    • Providing 24-hour notice if not able to join call
  • Professional etiquette fitting a paid consultant
Facilitator Roles/Expectations

• Clearly distinguish responsibilities between the facilitators if more than one facilitator
• Provide regular reminders before each meeting (ex: the week of, the day before, the day of)
• Bring refreshments and/or give a break (if possible)
• Be mindful of language so as not to pressure members to sharing if they don’t feel comfortable doing so
• Check in with members annually/biannually
• Be a neutral party
• Ensure every voice is heard, moderate/gatekeep so that no one person is dominating the conversation
• Make it fun!
Guest Speaker Roles/Expectations

- Researchers or clinicians who may be interested in obtaining feedback from a young adult advisory board may request or be invited to join a meeting as a guest speaker.
- Cardinal rule of guest speaker etiquette: Let the members do more of the talking than the speaker/s.
- Welcome and listen to all feedback regardless of whether or not it is able to be implemented.
- Don’t overwhelm members with information and stop for questions frequently.
- Be considerate of the diverse educational and employment experiences of the group, some will be more experienced, others will not.
Comfort Clause

- A set of rules that is made by the council for the council to create a safe space for everyone to use

- Using **person-first language**
- Stay engaged!
- Vegas Rule! --- Confidentiality
- **Open honesty!** --- No judgement!
- The “Oops” Clause
- Comfort Clause **can be changed!**
HELPFUL TIPS
Preparing Your Team and Young Adults

For the Team

- Ensure clarity across the organization on roles & responsibilities of the facilitators
- Train facilitators and staff on effectively working with YA members
- Train guest speakers (continuously) about proper etiquette when engaging young adult members

For Young Adults

- Provide thorough and comprehensive training
- Ongoing mentoring
- Support ongoing professional development
- Little things may not seem important to a “seasoned professional,” but can make all the difference to a young adult (bus times, filling out W-9 forms, etc)
Recruitment

We recruit with this flyer via:

- Online site
- Social media
- Emailing youth mental health champions or other well-connected people in the field
- YAB Members can share

What is the Youth Advisory Board?

The Transitions Research and Training Center has research and knowledge-sharing projects that aim to support young adults like you in your goals towards education and work.

We are seeking young adults to become members of our Youth Advisory Board (YAB) to help shape our activities and make them relevant to you and your experience!

Are you interested?

What does involvement in the Youth Advisory Board look like?

What the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) has to offer:

- Great Resume/Experience Builder
- Influence National Research
- $30/Hour Compensation

Interested?

Send us an email at Raphael.mizrahi@umassmed.edu with your
1. Name
2. Age
3. State of Residence
4. A letter (a paragraph or so) about your experience with mental health

We look forward to hearing from you!

For more information about the YAB, please e-mail Raphael Mizrahi at Raphael.mizrahi@umassmed.edu.

The Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research
Interviewing and Training

• Conduct informal interviews with new members to:
  • Get to know them
  • Show new members about the purpose of the council, and
  • Discuss logistical details of the council such as compensation and scheduling
Mission/Vision Development

• Should be created with council members
  • Helps focus the group and orient them toward goals that they would like to accomplish together
• It’s okay for facilitators to provide examples of what a mission/vision looks like or to gather ideas and create a rough draft for members to edit
Sample Agenda

Intro- Icebreaker
15 minutes

Part 1 – HYPE 2.0 Project Grant Proposal
40 minutes

Break
10 minutes

Part 2 – NITT-HT Young Adult Survey
40 minutes

Outro- Details about next meeting
15 minutes
Genuine Youth Involvement Versus Tokenism

Organizations that are tokenistic:
- Have youth just to say they have youth
- Are not willing to make changes and not really listening
- Have few youth and a non-diverse group giving feedback on everything youth-related
  - One young person, no matter how smart or experienced, cannot fairly represent the voices of all young people
- Approach young members unequally for opinions and decisions
SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES WITH THE YAB
Scheduling, scheduling, scheduling…

Flexibility is Key!

• Finding a time and location that works for YAs to attend is challenging given their frequent changing schedules due to school and work
• If meeting with young adults monthly, we recommend checking in with members to find times that they are available 3 times during the year to accommodate for the semester and summer schedules:
  • Doodle Polls are very helpful!
  • Finding locations can be challenging, aim to find a central location on a transportation route where most people can attend
• Check in with members about their attendance regularly, especially if certain members find it challenging to attend
Motivation

- Provide members with examples of how their feedback was used to improve research/services.
- Provide comments from speakers post-call:
  - “YAB members reviewed their online survey which led to cutting an entire module, addition of two YA-geared videos, and shortening of length from 1 hour to 40 minutes.”
- The Disclosure in the Workplace Tip Sheet added two additional pages based on YAB feedback on content.
TAKE-HOME MESSAGES
Take-Home Messages

- Advisory councils are an excellent way of making research/services more accessible and relevant to the target population

- Councils can be hosted in a variety of settings

- Special considerations for the young adult age group can be made to make youth councils successful

- Young adult councils are becoming more widely used to infuse youth voice into research and services and can be implemented in your organization as well!
More Resources

Stay tuned for a “Tips and Tricks to Starting a Young Adult Council” tip sheet later this year!

See our “Nothing About Us Without Us: Growing Meaningful Young Adult Involvement in Your Organization” webinar on our website at https://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/publication/webinars/
Special thanks to our Youth Advisory Board for giving feedback on this presentation!

And Thank You!

Contact us at: Raphael.Mizrahi@umassmed.edu and/or Tania.Duperoy@umassmed.edu

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And Thank You!
References


