

Speak Out Team Development and Youth Advocacy



Kim Stevens, NACAC

What is NACAC?

NACAC promotes and supports permanent families for children and youth in the United States and Canada who have been in care – especially those in foster care and those with special needs.

1. Public Policy Advocacy
2. Youth and Parent Leadership Development
3. Adoption Support
4. Education and Information Sharing

Advocates for Families First:
Helping ensure children in kinship, foster, and adoptive families thrive.

- North American Council on Adoptable Children
 - <http://www.nacac.org/parentgroups/parentgroups.html>
- Generations United
 - <http://www.gu.org/OURWORK/Grandfamilies.aspx>
- National Foster Parents Association
 - <http://www.nfpaonline.org>

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the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, and
the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative*

Why A Youth Network?

- Improve youths' lives
- Improve systems and communities
- Influence other young people to take action
- Address a specific need
- Respond to societal, community, and governmental issues
- Seize and create opportunities

Whatever it is, it must be a need that requires youth to work together.

Benefits of youth groups

- An opportunity for positive youth development
 - Uniting for friendship, community, support, growth, and fun
- An advocacy group for system reform
 - Uniting to work for themselves and other youth
- Healing and growth



Belonging

- Youth and young adults who have experience in foster care/adoption/kin care
 - Uniting as a welcoming, supportive, diverse, and inclusive team
 - Sharing varied experiences with adoption, foster care, residential homes, and kinship families



What About Trauma?

- Bearing witness
- Survivors of trauma heal best by “discovering meaning in their experience that transcends the limits of personal tragedy” and “by joining with others in social action.”

Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery

Subtle Therapy

- “Commonality with other people...means having a feeling of familiarity, of being known... It means taking part in...the everyday. ... The trauma survivor who has achieved commonality with others can rest from her labors. Her recovery is accomplished; all that remains before her is her life.”

Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery



Types of Youth Networks

- Peer-to-Peer Mentoring
- Traditional Mentoring
- Tutoring
- Life-Skills Training
- Advocacy
- Support
- Social



How To Decide What Type of Group

For youth:

- Are there issues important enough that you would join a group to change them?
- do you want a peer mentor?
- Do you have something to say/do/contribute?
- Are you looking for a social network?
- Do you have interests or talents to elevate?
- Do you have the time and energy to commit?



How To Decide (continued)

For staff:

- Are there system/policy/program issues that you believe youth can help address?
- Are there youth in your network who would work with you and is it something they believe in?
- Do you have the energy and personality to work as a colleague with youth?



Getting Started

- Consider purpose and goals
- Secure adult leadership
- Involve youth, get feedback
- Provide training and preparation
- Kick off with an event
- Refine, keep up enthusiasm!

Training Youth and Adult Partners

- Creating a team culture
- Crafting your story
 - What feels safe
 - What is your point/message
 - Staying on point
- Practice makes perfect

WHERE, WHEN, WHAT?

- Location for meetings must be inviting, non-threatening to youth
- Transportation and/or accessibility are factors
- Meetings must be both enjoyable and purposeful
- Host organization could/should provide resources
- Consider a mix of social, networking, mentoring, training, creative, and skill-building activities
- Determine how often/regularly your youth are able and willing to meet

Who are the youth?

- Youth and young adults you know
- Adolescent units, ILPs
- Youth and parent support groups
- Post-adoption centers
- Residential; hospital
- Agencies
- Audiences
- *Self-selection*



A youth support group should NOT be...

- Exclusive or “cream of the crop”
- Rigid about membership
- Therapy
- Using youth speakers to promote adult agenda



Challenges

- Continuity
- Transportation
- Scheduling
- System reform—persistence amid resistance
- Funding
- Staff support
- Relational issues



Activities— Training & Preparation

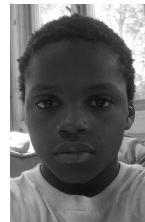
- Skill-building
 - Public speaking, creative expression
- Social connections
- Annual retreat
- Research and response
- Product development
 - Newsletter
 - Video
 - Monograph

Events - Endless Possibilities...

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Conferences and Trainings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – For parents, workers, judges, teachers, therapists, doctors... – National, local; self-initiated, and planned by others ■ Community Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Intergenerational Housing – Holiday Party – Adoption Events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Legislative Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – National Adoption Month Statehouse event – Directed testimony – Visits and letters on specific bills – Bill of Rights ■ Social Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Weekend retreat – Potluck dinners – Beach parties – Amusement parks – Art show - play |
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Messages and Themes

- Importance of family connections
- Race and culture in adoption
- Openness
- Transitions and moves
- Adolescence, aging out, permanence
- Advocacy skills and positive youth development



Adult Leaders Provide

- Physical and psychological safety
- Appropriate structure
- Supportive relationships
- Role modeling
- Opportunities to belong: inclusion and identity development



Youth Agenda

“When adults in power make decisions about children and youth who have been adopted or in foster care,

they need to involve us—

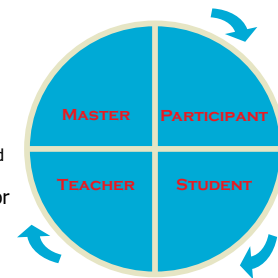
those who have personally experienced it.”

Evolution

- Youth share stories to promote changes
- Increase in well-being and self-efficacy for members — continuum of positive outcomes
- Educational and vocational opportunities
- Youth and adults as partners

Raising Voices for Change

- An opportunity for youth development
 - Uniting for friendship, support, growth, fun
- A partnership in achieving permanent family relationships
 - Uniting in creating and sustaining **family**
- An advocacy group for system reform
 - Uniting to work for themselves and other youth





Resources

Creating Mentoring Programs

- http://www.mentoring.org/start_a_program

Creating Tutoring Programs

- http://sppsfoundation.org/sites/default/files/best_practices_for_tutoring_programs_-_low_res_0.pdf

Creating Youth Programs

- <http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/start-a-youth-program>



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