



Plenary 2: Authentic Youth Collaboration vs. Authentic Youth Engagement, “Combatting Adulthood”

“Nothing about us, without us.” Whenever decisions are being made that affect young people, it is important that youth are at the table and have equitable decision-making responsibilities. Youth engagement succeeds best when it is authentic and is supported by youth–adult partnerships.

What is Authentic Youth Engagement?

Youth engagement has been defined as “young people who are actively and authentically involved, motivated, and excited about an issue, process, event, or program.”¹ Although organizations often engage youth, not all engagement is authentic. Engagement loses authenticity when adult partners are conflicted about questions of power and control.

Authentic youth engagement can best be described by focusing on the experiences of young people when they are engaged:

- They are respected, valued, and trusted and feel appreciated, safe, and comfortable.
- They feel they are working in an environment that facilitates their engagement, and they are involved in a meaningful way.
- Their voices are being heard and treated as worthwhile.
- They are given the opportunity to be involved and make decisions, gain leadership skills, and see their ideas realized.
- They are able to participate in the social aspects of their involvement.
- They see change and progress happening as a result of their contributions.
- They are in a space where they have ownership and control in decision-making processes.

¹ Hoffman, J., & Staniforth, S. (2007, May). *The Green Street guide to authentic youth engagement: Green Street and the National Youth Engagement Program*, as cited by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (April 29, 2012). *Authentic youth engagement: Youth–adult partnerships*. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/resources/authentic-youth-engagement/>



Key Elements and Core Values of Authentic Youth Engagement

Authentic youth engagement requires that young people have actual authority and responsibility, as well as opportunities to develop the skills needed to make sound decisions. For programs, community organizations, and policymakers, it means working as partners with youth, instead of making decisions for them or only providing services to them.

True youth engagement requires a fundamental shift in operations where youth have an authentic voice in the design, development, and day-to-day functions of activities. Youth need to be able to speak about and influence the issues that matter to them using leadership, personal power, community problem-solving, civic involvement, and their own voice.

There are a number of key elements and core values that organizations should consider and incorporate into their youth engagement efforts as they work toward a coordinated community response for preventing and ending youth homelessness.

KEY ELEMENTS OF AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	
Relevance	Engage youth around relevant issues that affect their individual and collective life conditions.
Accessibility	Demonstrate accessibility that is inclusive, engaging a broad cross-section of youth, including marginalized youth.
Consistency	Become an organization that champions the inclusion of youth as a routine practice.
Authenticity	Include authentic and formalized youth participation in program development, implementation, and evaluation. A high level of meaningful youth participation has clear roles, shared decision-making, a diversity of roles, youth empowerment, and increased personal agency for youth.
Hands-on, Action Learning	Offer projects that emphasize experiential learning and include action projects that have a range of structured and informal learning opportunities for youth to contribute.
Local Projects	Have a local community focus for youth action projects. Face-to-face, frequent participation is easier and results and recognition are more readily visible.
Scope	Include an evolving capacity for youth to participate and an increased range of opportunities.
Recognition and Respect	Honestly and openly respect youth opinions, allow them ample time and space in discussions, and recognize their contributions, including celebrating project milestones.



CORE VALUES OF AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

PREPARATION: Youth are effectively prepared and empowered to make informed decisions about matters that affect their lives.

- Effective preparation with and on behalf of youth requires time, effort, patience, relationship-building and awareness of youth needs.
- Support youth in developing self-advocacy skills, including when and how to seek advice and counsel from professionals and other caring adults.
- Authentic youth–adult partnerships must undergird preparation activities. It is within this context of mutual trust that adults must help youth recognize their strengths, leverage their expertise, and assert their leadership in reaching decisions.

SUPPORT: Youth are provided with customized services and a network of supportive relationships that meet their needs and promote a healthy transition to adulthood.

- Youth need access to a service array that is comprehensive, flexible, and capable of meeting their unique needs.
- Support systems should include formal resources and services from providers as well as informal supports from within a youth’s natural network of community relationships.
- Service systems should provide youth with equitable access to services that are culturally competent, outcome-focused, and attentive to their overall well-being.
- Family is critically important in the lives of youth. Their definition of family and their network of supportive relationships should be explored, respected, and appropriately included in life planning efforts.
- Youth should be monetarily compensated for their time and expertise, labor, and products that contribute to systems change, program implementation, policy development, and information sharing.

OPPORTUNITY: Youth are provided with an array of life opportunities that promote optimal growth and development, experiential learning, healthy risk-taking, and participation in normal everyday activities that contribute to social confidence and positive identity formation.

- Youth need support in developing financial capabilities and should have opportunities to practice their financial skills as they manage assets, participate in the workforce, and transact with mainstream banking institutions.
- Youth need to be safe, and assessments of their safety should be contextually relevant and free from variables that overstate risk and undervalue social experience.
- Youth in foster care should be provided with the same life opportunities afforded to youth who have not experienced involvement in the child welfare system.
- Youth need to experience positive reciprocity in relationships within their family, peers, and community groups, as well as feel valued in receiving supports and in giving back to their community.



Authentic Youth Engagement: Collaborating on Services

To collaborate with youth participants in an organization's programs and services, it is important to honor their autonomy to make important decisions that affect their lives. For example, a service provider could use an intake form to educate young people about available housing options rather than making the choice for them. This allows youth to make informed decisions for themselves.

Organizations should ensure safety for youth partners by differentiating between a young person's role as a participant and as a collaborator. For example, organizations can develop a clearly written policy to assure youth that their experience and access to services will not be adversely affected if they offer negative feedback about the program.

Youth participants sometimes require support from adult partners to become equipped with the tools they need to make informed decisions. Meaningful collaboration requires reducing power imbalances and their impacts, creating spaces where youth feel safe to make important decisions, and showing youth that their decisions matter and create results.

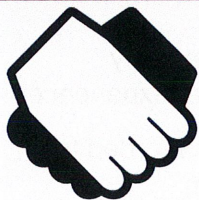
Authentic and Meaningful Youth–Adult Partnerships

In an authentic youth–adult partnership, both partners have equal opportunities to utilize skills, make decisions, and independently carry out tasks to reach shared goals. Adult partners should be intentional and transparent as the partnership is formed, providing space for youth partners to share their visions for the future through decision-making and leadership roles.

Authentic and meaningful youth–adult partnerships are built on mutuality—mutual learning, respect, trust, and involvement. This means that when adults need to hear the lived experience of youth, they ensure that youth are not tokenized, exploited, or asked to share their stories in a way that could be re-traumatizing. It is important that adult partners elevate youth voices, rather than speak for them, acknowledging that youth are experts of their own truths.

Equitable decision-making between youth and adults in program design, implementation, and evaluation tends to improve service quality and make programs more relevant and effective. Programs developed through authentic youth–adult partnerships display more awareness of the unique characteristics of youth experiencing homelessness and are more likely to speak to this population.

EVALUATING YOUTH–ADULT PARTNERSHIPS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION



Organizations can begin evaluating the authenticity and meaningfulness of their youth engagement efforts and youth–adult partnerships by asking the following questions:

- How are young people directly affecting decisions at my organization?
- How are young people generating solutions?
- How are young people at my organization benefitting from the value of their lived experience?



SUPPORTING YOUTH AND ADULTS IN DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Youth partners can be supported to:

- **Demonstrate their capabilities.** Youth can be helped to identify the strengths, interests, and commitments they bring to the partnership and may need support to communicate these to adult partners. This communication can provide adults with an understanding of all the strengths young people bring to the work, which can help adults more comfortably share responsibility and authority.
- **Accept feedback.** Adults can help youth partners see how they use constructive critique, a process that will also involve critiquing young people's ideas. Adult partners can also help youth understand that the constructive criticism process is not an indication of disrespect or dismissal.
- **Utilize opportunities.** Youth may need additional support both in and outside of meetings and events to be able to understand when an opportunity to contribute is available and to feel comfortable taking it. For young people to become comfortable taking such opportunities, adults must provide time, patience, and understanding.

Adult partners can be supported to:

- **Expect no more and no less from a young person.** Adults should expect from youth what they would expect from an adult partner: responsibility, skills, and participation.
- **Respect the time and responsibilities of youth.** This includes being aware of how other time commitments such as school, work, and other responsibilities may affect the availability of youth partners.
- **Treat youth as individuals.** Adults can assure youth partners that they are interested in their personal opinions and that they do not expect them to speak for all young people. Adults can recognize that youth partners bring individual skills, interests, and perspectives to the shared work.
- **Take time to explain.** Many young people may, for the first time, be assuming a role of authority, and they may be learning about how the homeless system of care works and what terminology is used in the field. Adults can ask for questions, give reasons for actions taken, and allow young people time to process information.
- **Plan for youth involvement.** Adults should schedule meetings at times when young people can attend and hold them in an accessible location. Youth can be invited to participate in projects or on committees whose activities are structured to help them feel welcome and able to move forward.
- **Recognize internal and external barriers to youth–adult partnerships.** Adults need to be comfortable with the abilities, skills, and knowledge that they bring and use these assets to address barriers to authentic partnerships.



Both youth and adult partners can be supported to:

- **Check assumptions and stereotypes.** Youth and adults are likely to bring biases about one another to the work. Adults may view young people very positively or, alternatively, as undependable and disinterested. Youth may see adults as reliable problem-solvers or as overly controlling. Some adults are afraid of young people, and some young people are intimidated by adults. Youth and adults may need help to recognize their partners as individuals with strengths and room to grow.
- **Practice good communication.** Adults may tend to interrupt, which can discourage youth from participating and sharing their voice. Adults may need help allowing youth to finish stating their ideas, and youth may need support to persevere despite interruptions. Young people need to know that using different language and communication styles than adults does not make their contributions less worthwhile.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING AUTHENTIC YOUTH–ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

1. Identify and offer training to help youth and adults partner effectively.
2. Recruit youth and adults who are willing and able to engage in the mutuality of the process that youth–adult partnerships require.
3. Create opportunities for youth and adults to explore what each brings to the table, encouraging open communication concerning mutual expectations.
4. Emphasize the mutuality of relationships: youth and adults should be seen as providing unique and valuable contributions to the partnership.
5. Ensure that adults and youth work together to determine roles, plan activities, set deadlines, create guidelines, and divide tasks.
6. Provide adequate resources for youth, including financial support and child care for young parents.
7. Support youth in making significant program and community decisions.
8. Hold meetings at times when youth are able to attend, such as hours when they are out of school.
9. Allocate resources to youth, including transportation to meetings, which may be provided by adult partners.
10. Offer youth and adults the opportunity to regularly reflect on their work and partnership.
11. Provide individuals who do not necessarily value youth–adult partnerships with opportunities to see the benefits of these partnerships, thereby supporting a cultural shift in which all adults and youth see the value and importance of partnering for change.



Identifying and Overcoming Barriers to Authentic Youth Engagement

It is important for organizations and collaborative partners in local efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness to identify and address any barriers that may inhibit authentic youth collaboration.

One significant barrier to authentically engaging youth is that it can be challenging work to adequately prepare adults and youth to work together as equal partners. It is important that all involved parties understand that it takes time and effort to achieve true, meaningful youth–adult partnerships—time to feel comfortable with one another, to agree on areas of importance, and to come to decisions that are agreed on by both the youth and adult partners.

Below are some additional potential barriers to authentic youth engagement for adult partners to consider, along with strategies that can be used to overcome them.

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

For youth and adult partners to collaborate effectively, it is important that young people are meaningfully engaged throughout the process.

Potential Barriers:

- **Tokenism:** Including representation from a certain group of people merely to create the illusion of diversity or equality.

Strategies to Consider:

- Ask youth to identify meaningful ways they can benefit from collaboration.
- Work with youth to identify their skills, strengths, and special abilities so they can be centered in the collaborative process.
- Offer opportunities to youth that enrich their quality of life and promote personal and professional development.
- Facilitate meaningful person-to-person connections, such as mentorship.
- Create a safe atmosphere that values positive thoughts and behaviors and encourages productive feedback.
- Equip youth with the education and tools necessary to advocate for their immediate needs and collective goals.



BUILDING TRUST

Establishing and building trust is essential to any effective working relationship. Once rapport is established, genuine collaboration can begin.

Potential Barriers:

- **Cultural incompetence:** Misunderstanding the needs and values of young adults whose lived experiences differ from your own.
- **Cultural insensitivity:** The inability or unwillingness to identify and accept cultural differences and power imbalances.

Strategies to Consider:

- Understand common traumas and stresses of young adults to avoid repeating them, which could be triggering.
- Maintain an accepting and affirming environment that meets physical and emotional safety needs.
- Anticipate cultural differences. Respond with sensitivity, compassion, and a commitment to learning.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Promote and respect the autonomy of young adults while intentionally creating space for personal and professional growth.

Potential Barriers:

- **Adulthoodism:** The belief that adults know more about what youth need than youth themselves. It is the systemic discrimination and prejudice against younger people based on their age.
- **Exploitation:** Treating people unfairly in order to benefit from their efforts.

Strategies to Consider:

- Invite young adults to make decisions that they feel are best for them and respect their choices.
- Encourage young people to advocate for themselves and their peers.
- Identify and remove organizational barriers between youth and higher management.
- Compensate young people equitably for their time, input, and lived experience.
- Make decisions through group discussion and critical analysis rather than simple majority votes.



Understanding and Combatting Adultism

Adultism is defined as prejudice toward and discrimination against children and younger adults based on their age. Authentic youth collaboration can be hindered when the ideas of young people are dismissed due to their age and presumed lack of knowledge or experience. Forms of adultism that prevent authentic youth engagement include the following:

- Making judgments and decisions based on generalizations about youth instead of dialogue and response to individuals and actual situations.
- Dismissing the choices young people make because adults claim to know better than them.
- Inviting youth with lived experience to share only their stories of trauma and not their expertise.
- Expecting youth to answer any question asked by an older adult, no matter how personal.

Adultism, like racism or sexism, is an example of systemic oppression. The learned ideas and behaviors caused by adultism can create divisive power imbalances in collaborations between youth and adult partners. The following chart presents common adultist behaviors and recommendations for addressing these behaviors through actions rooted in equity.

ROOTED IN ADULTISM	ROOTED IN EQUITY
Assuming that an adult knows what is best for youth because they are older or more experienced.	⇒ Respecting youth as the experts of their own lives and experiences.
Judging young people based on their appearances, thoughts, and actions, or personal preferences.	⇒ Anticipating, respecting, and celebrating differences among people.
Inviting participation from youth merely to create the impression of inclusion and diversity.	⇒ Actively listening to the opinions of youth and young adults with the intention of creating solutions based on their feedback.
Asking youth to speak publicly without proper information and training.	⇒ Educating and equipping youth with the tools needed to actively engage in advocacy.
Not compensating young people for their input, time, and effort.	⇒ Compensating youth in a way that's equivalent to adults doing the same work.
Committing youth to participate in broad discussions that may or may not be relevant to them.	⇒ Presenting youth with opportunities and asking if they are interested in participating.



- Soliciting the input of youth without first establishing transparent guidelines and expectations. ⇒ Establishing trust with young people by being clear and upfront about the parameters and goals of the collaboration.
- Asking youth to talk about their lived experience without considering their comfort level. ⇒ Asking youth what topics they feel comfortable discussing and informing them in advance of the intended purpose, target audience, and reach.
- Asking youth to participate in a process, but not reporting back the impact of their contributions. ⇒ Providing evidence of the impact and effectiveness of solutions and feedback offered by youth and young adults.

Resources

- **Youth Collaboration Toolkit**: 2017 toolkit developed through a partnership between the National Youth Forum on Homelessness (NYFH) and the True Colors Fund to help ensure that young people are authentically engaged while collaborating with the affirming adults in their lives
- **Authentic Youth Engagement: Youth–Adult Partnerships**: 2012 issue brief by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that outlines how child welfare agencies can support both strong youth–adult partnerships and authentic youth engagement
- **Achieving Authentic Youth Engagement: Core Values & Guiding Principles**: 2014 fact sheet by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that presents the three core values and related guiding principles that young people in foster care need to truly have a say in planning their own future
- **What is Authentic Youth Engagement?**: October 2010 presentation by Search Institute/Vision Training Associates at the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP) World Conference on defining authentic youth engagement from the youth perspective
- **Engaging Youth in Community Decision-making**: 2007 toolkit by the Annie E. Casey Foundation on the active engagement of youth and young adults in community decision-making
- **Engaging Youth on their Turf: Creative Approaches to Connecting Youth through Community**: 2007 report by Healthy Teen Network highlighting six programs utilizing creative approaches to connecting youth with their community
- **Want to Know What Youth Want and Need from Your Program? ASK THEM**: February 2016 MANY video on the importance of listening to youth to understand if programs and services are effectively meeting their needs
- **Engaging Youth not Traditionally Asked to Serve**: Guide from Youth Service America with tips and tricks for ensuring successful engagement and involvement of youth from diverse backgrounds



Profiles in Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness: Authentic Youth Engagement

The following profiles on authentic youth engagement have been curated from the Coordinated Community Plans of Round 1 YHDP grant recipients, as well as information provided by communities that have accepted the 100-day Challenge to End Youth Homelessness, an initiative made possible through funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Santa Cruz, CA

Core to every step of the YHDP process are the leadership and voice of the youth in Santa Cruz, including members of the Youth Advisory Board (YAB), youth representatives from partner agencies, and interested youth in the community. Their leadership and voice have been instrumental in several ways: developing the YHDP application, designing and facilitating the Community Steering Committee meetings, actively participating in all YHDP Community Steering Committee and workgroup meetings, prioritizing strategies/approaches that are client-driven and integrate youth leadership roles, providing substantial feedback on the community plan, and directing project application selection.

Youth leadership also emerged as a core strategy for future projects. For example, there was an emphasis on the role of peer mentors/peer navigators in a variety of settings, including conducting street outreach, engaging other youth experiencing homelessness, becoming housing navigators, and supporting the navigation of education/employment opportunities. These peer mentor/navigator positions provide opportunities for developing leadership skills and a pathway for youth to integrate into the community as essential contributing members.

Throughout the YHDP process, youth have demonstrated that when they are empowered to make decisions that affect their futures, they find their own inner strength and voice and are able to set and achieve goals. YHDP projects will be driven by this cornerstone of youth agency, working with youth to set their own goals and find their own unique talents that will lead to success.

YAB members have been cultivating their own leadership skills and building relationships with community partners. YAB members had the opportunity to participate in a two-day leadership training called Growing Greatness (adapted by Dr. Monica Sharma, former Director of Leadership and Capacity Development with the United Nations). The curriculum engages participants in identifying, communicating, and digging deeper into topics and issues about which they care deeply. As youth answered these questions for themselves, they connected their answers to their values, including equity, justice, compassion, and realizing their full potential. Youth were then guided to speak powerfully on these topics about which they care deeply to inspire themselves and others into action to effect positive sustainable change in their community.



Grand Traverse, Antrim and Leelanau Counties, MI

YOUTH VOICE AND LEADERSHIP

Ensuring youth take the lead in creating and solidifying a feasible action plan is paramount. Youth have been and continue to be active in developing and vetting each step along the way. Youth are equal partners at the table in the process, creating goals, objectives, and actions steps. As the action steps and corresponding projects are rolled out, youth will be empowered to take the lead in voicing their support, concerns, ideas, and more—*nothing about them without them*.

There is nothing in the Northwest Michigan Plan that was not directly developed by or reviewed and approved by the YAB. The YAB Chair, as well as other members, consistently attend the larger planning meetings, participate in the technical assistance calls, and take part in various panels and presentations across the community. Each youth has a different lived experience and a unique perspective. The YAB continually discusses ways to reach out and engage other youth, especially within the more rural counties, through social media, direct invitations, and remote access so that youth from far away can still be involved. They are also cognizant that their perspective is not the only perspective of youth. The group continues to discuss ways to engage more youth voices from within the most rural areas in the region.

Opportunities to attend youth centered conferences, forums, and panels are available to YAB members, providing them with the ability to gain additional knowledge and resources, as well as to share their experiences on a broader scale. The YAB Chair and Homeless Youth Initiative (HYI) Chair have also co-presented to local community organizations.

Seattle/King County, WA

Youth voice has been an integral part of Seattle's planning processes. All Home has partnered closely with The Mockingbird Society's Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness (YAEH) on efforts to prevent and end homelessness among youth and young adults (YYA). YAEH, comprising young people ages 13–24 who have experienced homelessness, was a formal participant in the development of the Continuum of Care's (CoC) Comprehensive Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. YAEH conducted a 6-month-long planning process resulting in the inclusion of YYA-led recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan and YAEH endorsement of the overall plan.

Additionally, All Home has obtained input from YAEH and agency-level youth advisory boards on the design of specific strategies such as coordinated entry, expanded employment programming for homeless YYA, and King County's Best Starts for Kids Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative (a newly approved county levy supporting improved health and well-being of King County residents by investing in prevention and early intervention for children, youth, and families).



Cincinnati, OH

The Lighthouse Youth Advisory Council (LYAC) was established in 2013 to give youth experiencing homelessness and youth with foster care experience a say in changing youth-serving systems. Since 2013, LYAC members have helped influence their elected officials to pass Fostering Connections, a statewide program to serve youth who age out of foster care through their 21st birthday; trained foster parents on how to best support teenagers; and shared their experiences at conferences and workshops. Additionally, Hamilton County child welfare runs a council for youth currently in foster care, the City of Cincinnati hosts an annual Youth Summit, and young people are active on neighborhood councils.

The voices of youth in Cincinnati and Hamilton County are evident throughout the Coordinated Community Plan, specifically in determining gaps in the system, creating innovative ideas, developing stronger service models, and sharing feelings and experience through poems.

Anchorage, AK

Anchorage is committed to promoting youth engagement and leadership. The Youth Task Force overseeing the development and implementation of initiatives to eliminate youth homelessness combines members from Covenant House Alaska's youth advisory council with members from the Mayor of Anchorage's Youth Advisory Commission.

Youth are integrated into all levels of leadership to ensure efforts are informed by youth with lived experience of homelessness and that programs and services are designed to build on individual and collective strengths and are matched to youth needs and preferences.

Hennepin County, MN (100-day Challenge)

The Hennepin County 100-day Challenge team set out to actively and authentically engage youth, including meeting youth where they were and facilitating the involvement of youth at all levels of decision-making. Adult 100-day Challenge team members are dedicated to engaging youth in the ways in which they would like to be involved in the initiative, including providing flexibility and understanding around expectations for meeting attendance.

Key to authentic youth engagement during the Hennepin 100-day Challenge was ensuring that involvement in the initiative accommodated the needs, schedules, and obligations of the youth team members. The Hennepin 100-day Challenge team hosted their meetings at the local community college where youth team members were taking classes to increase the ease of attendance and utilized text messaging for communication with youth team members.

One of the goals for Hennepin County following the 100-day Challenge was to merge existing youth councils at individual organizations or agencies into a formal youth advisory council to support county-level decision-making. The Hennepin County CoC YAB met for the first time in March 2018, providing an opportunity for youth with lived experience to inform local homeless and housing policies.



LESSONS LEARNED: AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Continuously Solicit and Incorporate Youth Feedback

The Hennepin County 100-day Challenge team continuously solicited feedback from youth with lived experience during the 100-day Challenge initiative to help with activities from planning through implementation. The 100-day team worked to engage youth from Day 1 of the initiative and keep youth engaged throughout the process, including the involvement of existing youth boards in providing guidance on topics related to the juvenile justice and foster care systems. Hennepin County found youth feedback is key to developing effective services, as well as thinking about systemic policy design that affects youth at risk of and experiencing homelessness.

Support Capacity Building and Youth Empowerment

The Hennepin County 100-day Challenge created new opportunities to empower youth with lived experience and build their capacity as leaders in local efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness. Participation in the 100-day Challenge and other ongoing youth homelessness initiatives provides opportunities for youth with lived experience to build their resumes, share their experience and expertise with community members and provider staff, and gain decision-making knowledge and skills. Youth members of the 100-day Challenge team were also empowered to attend conferences regarding youth homelessness to learn, network with other individuals working in the field, and share their knowledge.

Compensate Youth for Their Time and Expertise

Authentic youth engagement includes recognizing the value of work contributed by youth with lived experience and providing compensation for their time and expertise. Youth with lived experience in Hennepin County have been hired through a contract with the YMCA to participate on juvenile justice and foster care youth action boards. The Hennepin County 100-day team has established both short- and long-term goals to increase employment within the homeless response system for youth with lived experience. The Hennepin County 100-day team also stressed the importance of working with youth to determine what incentives and forms of compensation may work best for them, including consideration of how different forms of compensation may interact with other benefits or compensation they receive.



Define “Youth Voice” and What It Means for Authentic Youth Engagement

Hennepin County continues to work with youth with lived experience to define “youth voice” and what authentic youth engagement should look like in practice. The 100-day team is working to ensure that there is a sustainable and ongoing commitment to authentic youth engagement throughout the community and that this commitment is reflected in the county’s programs, policies, and systems design. Youth with lived experience are at the forefront of defining youth voice and authentic youth engagement, as well as shaping the path forward for continued youth engagement and involvement at all levels of decision-making in Hennepin County.

