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"Stepping up:
Successful advocacy by
youth and young adult-led organizations"
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Stepping up:
Successful advocacy by youth and young adult-led organizations

February 24, 2016

Presenters:

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Brie Masselli, Director TA & Evaluation, **Youth M.O.V.E National**

Today's Presenters

Nancy Koroloff

Nicholas Buekea

Barbara Friesen

Brie Masselli

Webinar Purpose:

To consider information about advocacy and policy change efforts in the youth mental health field.

This discussion will feature a study of successful advocacy efforts by youth-led organizations with a focus on system and policy change in mental health and other youth-serving systems.

Learning Objectives

- Webinar participants will learn about:
  - The value of youth voice in policy change
  - A working definition of policy;
  - A study of youth-led system and policy change
    - Purpose
    - Methods (recruitment, data collection, analysis)
    - Findings
  - Recommendations for future change efforts

- Methods
  - Recruitment
    - Youth M.O.V.E
    - Young Adult Advisory Panel
    - Asked colleagues & youth experts for ideas
    - FaceBook post
    - Suggestions from study participants
  - Pre-interview
  - Collected organizational information directly & on internet

- # Methods (Cont.)
  - ## Data collection
    - Focused on one recent policy change effort;
    - Phone or face-to-face interviews;
    - Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.
  - ## Analysis
    - Used software program (Atlas-ti) to organize & code interview transcripts;
    - Identified & summarized themes; connected themes to quotations.

What questions did we ask?

- ✓ How did this policy issue come to your attention?
- ✓ What process was used to learn about the issue?
- ✓ How did group make decisions?
- ✓ Partners?
- ✓ Training for policy work?
- ✓ Ingredients for success?
- ✓ Lessons learned/Recommendations?

Facing Foster Care in Alaska

Target for change	Goal of change effort	Outcome
State Legislation	Extend foster care to age 21; allow reentry between 18 and 21 if needed.	Legislation passed
We polled our members…and asked what do you want to see changed …We came up with a policy agenda that outlined a number of things for older youth transitioning to adulthood…		

Young Adult Organizations Interviewed

Florida Youth Shine

Target for change	Goal of change effort	Outcome
State Legislation	"Let kids be kids" – Reduce barriers to foster youths' participation in normal activities (e.g., field trips, sporting events, vacations or sleepovers).	Legislation passed

Hey, why can't kids spend the night? Why do kids have to constantly go to court to do A, B, C. Why can't we just be like regular kids, kids that live with their families?

Young Adult Organizations Interviewed

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JUST KIDS

Just Kids – Community Law in Action, Baltimore

Target for change	Goal of change effort	Outcome
State Legislation	Hold youth (14-17) charged as adults in juvenile facilities, not adult jails.	Legislation passed

Yes, there is a statute that kids as young as 14 can be automatically charged as adults … and held in adult jails pretrial. That is the statute that we changed...by dealing with where they are held pretrial.

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Oregon Foster Youth Connection

Targets for change	Goal of change effort	Outcome
State Legislation	1. Provide college tuition waivers for foster youth; 2. Foster care Bill of Rights.	Legislation passed

1)…there was a need for youth who wanted to go to universities, community college …and we felt like the Tuition Waiver would kind of help out with some of those expenses; 2)…there was a huge buy-in and a lot of support from the community around.

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Youth 'N Action, *Washington State*

Target for change	Goal of change effort	Outcome
State rules on peer support certification	Develop curriculum to train Certified Youth Peer Supporters (CYPS) so can be eligible for Medicaid reimbursement	Curriculum completed & approved for Medicaid reimbursement

It was to have a Medicaid reimbursable certified peer training geared toward youth and families, because…our state has had a certified peer training…There was no such thing back then as youth partners.

Young Adult Organizations Interviewed

YOUTH MOVE OREGON

Target for change	Goal of change effort	Outcome
Mental Health Division Policy	A policy that requires meaningful young adult involvement in mental health advisory groups.	Policy under review by Children's System Advisory Committee; likely to be adopted.

…all we expected was youth involvement, but there was no expectation of how far we would get. Policy work takes so long and having everybody at the table and keeping them at the table to make this process really work can take a long time.

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Lummi Nation I.P.O.D (Indian People's Own Determination) Youth M.O.V.E (Washington State)

Target for change	Goal of change effort	Outcome
Foster care system & youth awareness	Increase Lummi youth voice and awareness of rights in foster care	Words Not Spoken in initial phase

So…there is no visible support for children and youth that are impacted by the foster care system. …(Individual)…is calling this to adults and elders' attention to have more support available for youth that are in the foster care system that don't have a voice.

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BRAVEHEARTS M.O.V.E. New York

Target for change	…	Outcome
Expanding & improving available services	Create a peer-to peer navigator program	Program was established; youth voice makes substantial contribution to policy discussion in Westchester County, NY.

So what…we created was the idea of a team of young people that would be trained by various entities to go out and work in the community with young adults who were currently receiving …services…, and serve as experts in how to traverse those systems.

But…is taking it to the next level, because it is taking it from the ground level of working with young adults in the community, to system-change levels in working with family court and working with the juvenile justice system, and working to redevelop how independent living skills are given.

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YOUTHMOVE MAINE & CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH MAINE

Target for change	Goal of change effort	Outcome
State Legislation	Add youth & family voice to Continuous Quality Improvement Process	Youth & family voice added to CQI; project stopped by new governor.

Each agency got a report card that showed what their trauma-informed …assessment score was, as well as gave them scores on System of Care guiding principles.

Definition of Policy

- Public policy is…a system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning a given topic [enacted] by a governmental entity or its representatives (Kilpatrick, 2014).

- Generally, "policy" is understood as formal, written, rules or regulations. Can be federal, state, local.

- Policy also exists at the agency level, and can be either formal, or informal (unwritten), implemented through the actions of employees.

- Examples of important policies for young adults include housing (eligibility, rights and responsibilities), education, employment, and student loans, among others.

The Policy Process

-discussions with people likely to be affected by the policy change; gathering support

staying connected and informing all concerned parties about status

coordination

consultation

decision

consideration by legislature, county/city, agency heads

-proposed bills
-changes in agency rules

policy instruments

implementation

Gathering information so decision-makers can make informed judgment

policy analysis

Turn decisions into action; goals become practice.

evaluation

identify issues

gather Information to learn about effects of policy, make needed adjustments

awareness of problem, need for change arises through media, from constituents, as result of surveys, etc.

The Australian Policy Cycle
Althaus, Bridgman & Davis, 2013

The Policy Process

coordination

consultation

We did some individual meetings with the education subcommittee members…just to gauge where people were at…

decision

…A group of us flew again to Juneau and went and met with legislators and…writing letters to the media and giving testimony.

policy instruments

The study was introduced to us by Open Society Institute…we found lots of kids who were automatically charged as adults.

policy analysis

implementation

The youth & families came together and we created a CQI card…it breaks down what we consider quality

evaluation

identify issues

Yeah, it started at one of our statewide retreats. We had a big brainstorming session with all of our members…Then we narrowed it down to the ones we thought were the most realistic.

…we have really attempted to track very, very closely what is happening. We are not just looking at it at the beginning and at the end. We are doing a lot of process evaluation and really seeing at various points how various systems are responding.

- Outcomes of policy process

- Obstacles

- Ingredients for Success

- Recommendations

Range of topics

- **<u>Foster care</u>**:
    - *Extend age to 21 if needed;*
    - *Establish "normalcy" for foster youth;*
    - *College tuition waivers;*
    - *Foster care Bill of Rights;*
    - *Increase youth voice;*

- **<u>Justice/juvenile justice:</u>**
    - *Address issues re: treatment of youth charged as adults;*

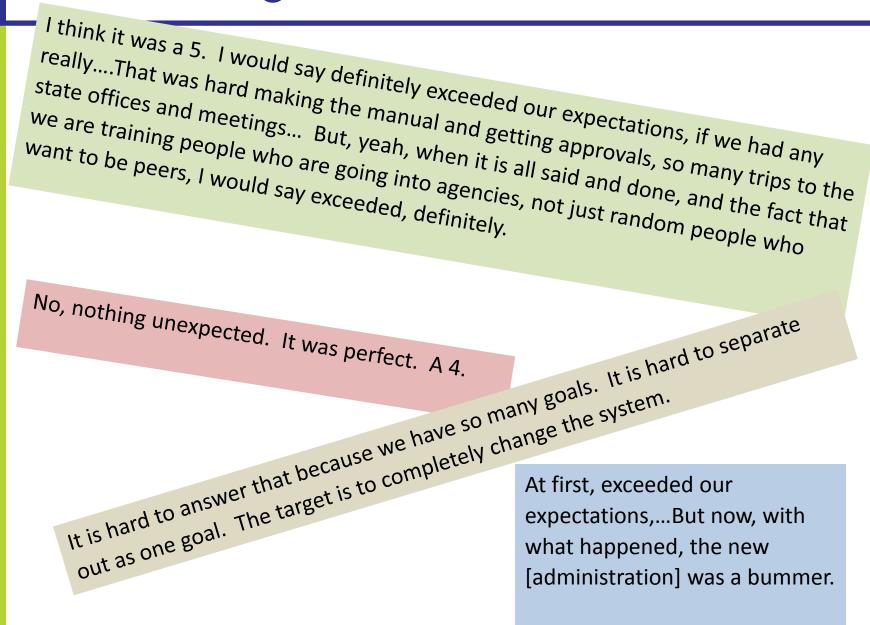- **<u>Mental Health/System of Care:</u>**
    - *Establish "meaningful youth involvement" in advisory groups;*
    - *Prepare Certified Peer Supporters – Medicaid reimbursement;*
    - *Create a Peer to Peer Navigator program;*
    - *Add youth & family voice to Continuous Quality Improvement process.*

Findings: Outcomes

- Almost all organizations met or exceeded their expectations;

- Seven of the nine young adult organizations interviewed achieved their goals;

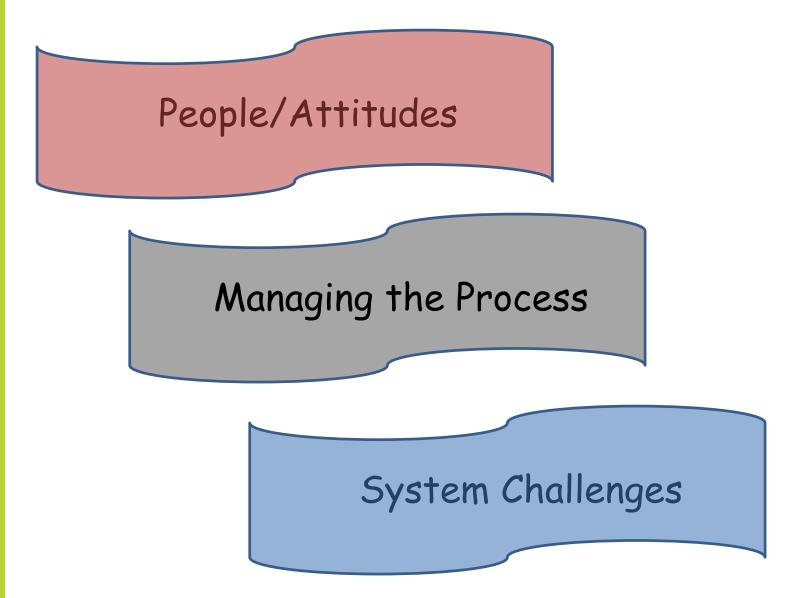- Two groups are still working to make the changes they have set as goals.
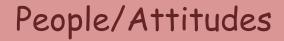
Findings: Outcomes (1-4 scale)

I think it was a 5. I would say definitely exceeded our expectations, if we had any really....That was hard making the manual and getting approvals, so many trips to the state offices and meetings... But, yeah, when it is all said and done, and the fact that we are training people who are going into agencies, not just random people who want to be peers, I would say exceeded, definitely.

No, nothing unexpected. It was perfect. A 4.

It is hard to answer that because we have so many goals. It is hard to separate out as one goal. The target is to completely change the system.

At first, exceeded our expectations,...But now, with what happened, the new [administration] was a bummer.

People/Attitudes

Managing the Process

System Challenges

People/Attitudes

- Disrespecting youth
- Skepticism about peer support
- Low professional commitment
- Resistance-lawmakers
- Resistance - public

Initially there was a lot of resistance, because some of the more conservative lawmakers didn't really understand … We had lawmakers making comments in committee, during testimony, saying things like, "When are these kids going to get jobs?"

People were, "No, it will never happen. There is too much risk. They are going to party and all kinds of boundaries violations."

We had people tell us to move on with the health care bill, with driver's ed, because we went to the capitol for those, and said, "You are just setting these youth up for failure."
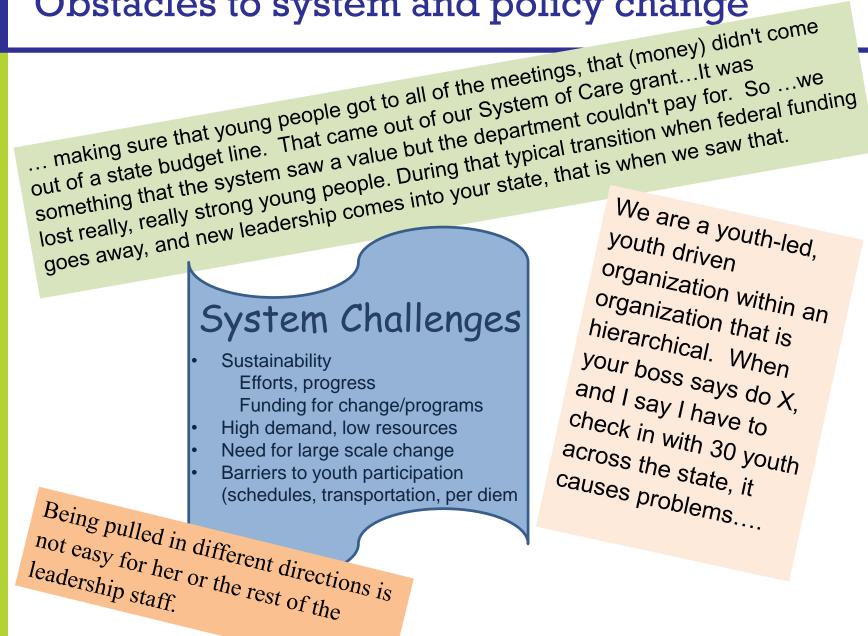
Obstacles to policy change

There were sometimes different wording than from what us common folk speak of sometimes. That was a little bit of an obstacle—one person trying to have the proper wording for everything. There was also the alphabet soup of everybody's lingo.

Managing the Process

- Finding common Language
- Disagreement among partners
- Discouraging setbacks, slow progress
- Communicating across diverse groups, geography

A lot of our school, and I know this for myself and it is a situation of being dis-encouraged. A lot of the times we will go and share our story with the public in an assembly. We are in a room full of people, policy makers, and sometimes they -- I know in one instance they said to me, "If these kids act like animals, then we should lock them away like animals."

… making sure that young people got to all of the meetings, that (money) didn't come out of a state budget line. That came out of our System of Care grant…It was something that the system saw a value but the department couldn't pay for. So …we lost really, really strong young people. During that typical transition when federal funding goes away, and new leadership comes into your state, that is when we saw that.

System Challenges

- Sustainability
    Efforts, progress
    Funding for change/programs
- High demand, low resources
- Need for large scale change
- Barriers to youth participation (schedules, transportation, per diem

We are a youth-led, youth driven organization within an organization that is hierarchical. When your boss says do X, and I say I have to check in with 30 youth across the state, it causes problems….

Being pulled in different directions is not easy for her or the rest of the leadership staff.

Ingredients for Success

- Relationships with Partners
- Support of the umbrella organization
- Champions
- Youth input and involvement

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS

- ✓ The lobbyist, their lobbyist supported us. So that was absolutely wonderful to have some other people down there to catch things if we weren't available.

- ✓ We were huge partners with a community college….they were coming down and testifying in support of the bill and sharing their experience.

- ✓ The fact that the professional community is willing to view us as experts -- I think it is one thing to having a young person be like a flower at the centerpiece at the table, …and you are saying that you have them "involved"

SUPPORT OF THE UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION

- ✓ We should be able to do what we are supposed to do, and that is one thing I give credit to our state for. They really never micro-manage our program. They keep their eyes on us for sure.

- ✓ I have to get the budget approved through our program manager – you guys know how it goes – so all that stuff gives us a structure that we need, so I can focus on the youth.

- ✓ Our parent organization provided us with a lot of insight as far as what their intentions were with the organization, how they wanted to help.

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CHAMPIONS

- ✓ We have friends in the legislature, or champions we call them. They are passionate about child welfare issues and children's issues. So we know who to go to. Those that maybe have sponsored a bill...or those who have expressed interest, or...have welcomed us into their office....

- ✓ We go to the people that we know advocate for us and support our decisions, and...get them behind us. If they can't change anything at the state level and we <u>do</u> have to make a legislative piece, then that's where we go. We try to make sure that we went through all the steps before we make those legislative pieces.

- ✓ So the connections with the secretary of DCF – it has been a tradition. We have breakfast and dinner or lunch with the secretary. Some of us have his personal number and are friends on our Facebook.

YOUTH INPUT AND INVOLVEMENT

✓ What we have been able to do in 5 years when we had zero members in our database to the thousands that we have now and the pieces of legislation we were able to change – that would not have been possible without partnering with young people, specifically with young people who were directly impacted by the policy.

✓ Just having youth on board and listening to their opinions and voices – that is what I believe is the most important component. If you don't have a youth voice on a board when it is a policy toward youth, then what's going on?

✓ One of the reasons why youth voice is so important today [in Indian country] is because I think we are going through a generation change. The old methods and approaches are not working anymore and what better way to start figuring out how they are going to work than to hear our youth talk?

Recommendations

➢ Prepare young people for the work

➢ Build relationships

➢ Stay focused on youth voice

➢ Don't give up

➢ Choose your battles wisely

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Prepare young people for the work.

- Prepare your youth beforehand…because some issues where there were not-so-friendly [comments] we prepared them for that so they knew what to do and how to handle those situations.

- …We always, always, always prep them before meetings… talking about what they can expect and…making talking points of what things they think need to be changed.

- So we are educated on the legislative process and where the bill stands, what committee it is referenced in, and then we advocate. We share our stories. We talk about what the bill would do, and whether it is cost neutral, whether it would cost the state money and so on and so forth.

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➤ Build relationships

    ➤ We were just lucky enough to have really strong relationships with folks in the state that felt comfortable enough to be, "Can you stop—I don't understand what that means," so we were learning as we go.

    ➤ If you are swimming upstream and there is no one to help you, it is a lot harder than when there is someone there to pull you up the stream.

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➢ Remember the importance of youth voice

➢ Trust that stories are really crucial to any piece of legislation that you are passing, whether it is higher education, health education, financial literacy … and the stories and the hardships and adversities of the youth.

➢ [State] Representative XXX spoke to us … and he said, "you guys have to come talk to us because we have no idea what you have been through…You have to talk to legislators so we actually know what is going on. All we see is numbers on paper."

Recommendations

➢ Don't give up

  ➢ Stay rooted in your cause, and don't act on a partial decision or a partial feeling. Go with what everyone has at most, mostly, agreed on.

  ➢ He [legislator] said what this is going to take, this child welfare issue, … is constant, relentless advocacy -- **constant, relentless advocacy**."

  ➢ I think coming at it with all different approaches is really what it was. It wasn't just one thing. We tried from every angle to make something happen. I think that is why it was so successful.

Recommendations

> ## Choose your battles wisely
>
> > If you don't know what you want to accomplish, then how are you going to get support around it, and have other people vote to support it, if you don't know what you are doing?
>
> > We have learned over the years that there are some tough subjects.
>
> > We didn't say, "fix normalcy and get rid of group homes." We broke those apart, because then we realized if something is attached to something else that we know won't pass right away….
>
> > We have learned we have to take it one step at a time, one issue at a time."

Resources

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More Resources

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Comments,

Questions,

& Discussion?

For more information

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