

DOCUMENTING THE BENEFITS OF AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

THE STUDY AND METHODS: Researchers from Washington State University set out to document authentic youth engagement practices and results in four sites of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative®, which works to make sure young people who have spent time in foster care have the relationships, resources and opportunities they need to transition successfully to adulthood. They reviewed documents from sites in Georgia, Hawaii, New Mexico and Tennessee, analyzed data from the Opportunity Passport® Participant Survey, conducted surveys with 46 young people and 35 staff and community partners and interviewed 15 youth and 15 staff and community partners.

WHAT IS AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT? Those interviewed identified four components that make youth engagement authentic: youth-adult partnerships, preparation, opportunities and support. It means keeping young people at the center of work on their behalf by developing nurturing, trusting relationships and amplifying their voices.



KEY FINDINGS

1 Despite challenges, authentic youth engagement efforts led to important results across sites, building youth confidence and ability to advocate for themselves.

2 Youth engagement has influenced changes in policy and practice, including:

- extending foster care
- addressing barriers to Medicaid coverage
- increasing living allowance for expectant and parenting youth.

3 Sites had some difficulty initiating and maintaining youth engagement, particularly with young people who are having trouble meeting basic needs, such as food and housing.

4 Sites have the tools and processes to engage youth, but could improve and sustain youth engagement by expanding partnerships with community members and community organizations to use resources like financial training and college help.



RECOMMENDATIONS



Engage more youth and a larger diversity of youth, including:

- youth of color
- parenting youth
- youth no longer in care
- youth with diverse sexual orientations and gender identity or expression
- older youth
- youth with juvenile justice system involvement



Develop better and culturally relevant strategies for recruiting youth and sustaining their engagement over the long term.



Equip young people to implement their ideas and see themselves as change agents, including participation in activities that involve evaluation, policy advocacy and shaping practice.



Better prepare staff to engage in youth-adult partnerships and to support youth, and make resources available to do this work well.



Find ways for site staff and young people to cultivate trusting relationships and communication.

Findings from Washington State University (2019). *In-depth case studies of authentic youth engagement in Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative sites.*



LEARN MORE

Read more about the findings at www.aecf.org.

