

# THE POWER OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

## WHAT IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

Youth Engagement is a strategy used to recognize that youth have important insight into what they need, and is an element of positive youth development. Organizations and agencies incorporate consistent, meaningful, and sustainable efforts to incorporate the voices of youth into service planning and delivery.

Including people who receive services in efforts to improve those services is not a new idea. It has been gaining momentum in the mental health, public health, community action, and disability rights fields for years. Though youth engagement will look different within each agency, it typically includes four main principles: Inclusion, Collaboration, Equality, and Respect.



Meaningful youth engagement takes time to cultivate. For many youth service agencies, it takes a culture change process – in policies, paperwork, attitudes, and practices. For youth that are hired into staff positions or recruited as advisors, it is a process too of learning how to fit into organizations and use their voices and opinions to spark changes.

## WHY IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

Without youth engagement, programs risk missing the mark. With it, youth have the power to be real advocates for themselves and others like them. They can raise terrific and important questions. When programs answer those honestly and are open to change, they end up stronger, more effective, and more collaborative.

Beyond the desire to offer relevant and client-driven programming and services, there are often financial or regulatory requirements to engaging youth. Many organizations that receive federal funding, for example, may have a stipulation to engage and include youth at every level of an organization.