



## Recovery through Participation: Key Concepts

### INTEGRATING...

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT • YOUTH ENGAGEMENT • TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE • PEER SUPPORT • RECOVERY

**Youth engagement** is a strategy of the **positive youth development** approach that views youth as resources, not problems, and values the input of youth receiving services into the design and delivery of those services. According to Karen Pittman, an originator of this approach, helping young people become “problem free” is not enough. We also have to engage with them to become “fully prepared” to take on rebuilding communities for the next generation.<sup>1</sup>

There are a range of meaningful ways to engage youth and elevate youth voice in an organization or program – from youth feedback surveys and focus groups to advisory groups and evaluation teams to hiring youth in **peer support** roles and including them on boards and councils.

*Any organization willing to build a culture that supports youth voice and engagement can find an option to fit their capacity and goals.*

**Trauma-informed care** is a way to ensure that all of an organization’s services and interventions are reconsidered and evaluated based on an understanding of the effects of trauma, trauma assessment, and procedures and interventions that do no harm or inadvertently re-traumatize young people.<sup>2</sup> Trauma-informed care is an approach designed to support recovery, done with the understanding that some youth with complex trauma may also need specialized trauma-focused treatment.<sup>3</sup>

A core element of trauma-informed care is to **engage youth in their own treatment and recovery**. This means engaging youth in planning services and evaluating the impact of those services so that programs are stronger as well as more relevant and engaging.<sup>4</sup> Trauma assessment, safety plans, and treatment goals are youth-directed and outcome-informed. The focus of trauma-informed services is empowerment, not management and control.<sup>5</sup> Youth remain in control of their lives and decisions by collaborating with providers in services and interventions. They are seen as **equal partners** with valuable insights.

Youth engagement also has benefits for the youth being engaged. It helps them in their own recovery journey by increasing motivation for change, especially when they are listened to with respect, collaborative intention, and encouragement.<sup>6</sup> Outcome research suggests that youth involvement in programming is highly related to positive outcomes and that the alliance with the youth worker (as the youth sees it) provides **an ongoing partnership** that supports change.<sup>7</sup>

*Meaningful youth engagement is a critical piece of trauma-informed care that strengthens programs while supporting the youth being served.*

<sup>1</sup> Pittman, K. (1999) The power of engagement. The Forum for Youth Investment. Washington, D.C. Online at <http://forumfyi.org/content/youth-today-power-eng>

<sup>2</sup> Hodas, G. (2006) Responding to childhood trauma: The promise and practice of trauma-informed care. Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Jennings, A. (2004) Models for developing trauma-informed behavioral health systems and trauma-specific services. Virginia, National Association of State Mental Health Hospital Program Directors (NASMHPD).

<sup>4</sup> Op. Cit. Hodas, G. (2006)

<sup>5</sup> Harris, M. & Fallot, R. (2001): Using trauma theory to design service systems. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>6</sup> Najavits, L. M., & Cottler, L. (2014). Treatment improvement protocol: Trauma-informed care in behavioral health settings. *Washington, DC: Center for Substance Abuse Treatment/Department of Health and Human Services, 31.*

<sup>7</sup> Duncan, B., Miller, S., & Sparks, J. (2004) *The heroic client: A revolutionary way to improve effectiveness through client-directed, outcome-informed therapy.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass