

# Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities

## Person-Centered Thinking, Planning, and Culture

### *Person-Centered Thinking & Planning Tip Sheet for Foster Care in New York*

#### What does it mean to be person-centered?

Being person-centered is about how you look at the world. This perspective considers the young person as an active participant in their own life choices. It is seeing the person's strengths first, instead of their disabilities, deficits, or things that others may think need to be "cured."

Scan this with your smartphone for resources, examples, and more information on this topic!



#### Person-Centered Work Everyday

The following are ways to think about, discuss, and infuse person-centeredness into your everyday work with young people in foster care. Using these tips over time should develop/improve your organization's person-centered culture.

#### Incorporate the Youth Voice

Youth in foster care should understand that their voices can contribute to change! The voices that matter the most are theirs. One way to better understand how to involve youth is to use What Helps, What Harms, the National Policy Initiative document created under the program Motivating Others through Voices of Experience (Youth M.O.V.E.). What Helps, What Harms was developed by Jessica Grimm from the Bravehearts, a thriving youth support and advocacy group in Westchester County, NY. The Bravehearts have received statewide and national praise and support for their incredible work.



#### Use the Person-Centered Principles

In learning how to become more person-centered, it helps to have some guidelines or principles to inform practice. Professionals and foster parents need to learn about the young person focusing on their interests and strengths. If needed, help them explore their world and find their interests/strengths. Person-centered thinking means putting the person and their strengths, goals, and needs in the center of their lives. Everyone has strengths to be shared and can make a difference. Principles include:

- **Choices:** Making informed choices based upon their experiences and information from trusted adults about the likely outcomes. Choices can begin with everyday items (what to have to eat or what to wear) and progress to decisions where some risk is involved (where to work, how to spend money, etc.).
- **Community:** Promoting positive participation in the community using their strengths and interests. One way to show success in community participation? People miss them when they are not there.
- **Flexibility:** Finding flexibility in when, where, how, and with whom the young person interacts. There are accommodations made for their internal clock (moving away from scheduling during traditional "business hours" as applicable and able if he/she is a "night person.").
- **Goals:** Using the young person's strengths, preferences, desires, and needs to create goals. It may be helpful to make short-term, achievable goals in the beginning to build confidence and competence.
- **Changes:** Ensuring the young person's active participation in all planning around their life and their ability to make changes to these plans. The plan grows and changes with the person as new likes and dislikes are discovered.

## It's Not Easy

Moving from system-focused work to person-centered work means challenging processes and procedures that have “always been done that way.” It may mean asking a lot of “why” questions, such as

- Why does the person want to do that? Being creative requires a full understanding of the situation and knowing why a person wants to do something is important.
- Why do we need to do it the way we've always done it? Is it based on regulations or local policies/practices? Do those policies still fit our work today?
- Why can't we support the person to do what they would like? Is it based on our needs and preferences or the organizations? How can I set aside my preferences and those of the organization to be more person-centered?



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