

# Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities

## Relationship & Community Building

### *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!



#### **Relationships are Key**

Relationship and community building related to young people in foster care is important in two ways. First, it may be helpful to find supportive adults and communities for young people to count on as they transition to life out of foster care. Second, relationships of professionals within and between agencies and systems can help young people who may have multiple challenges and not fit into "typical" or traditional service delivery options.

#### **Connecting to Supportive Adults and Community**

Many typical young people are not ready to be completely independent at 18, 21, or even 30 and may keep close ties with parents or other family members to call upon for support. Youth aging out of foster care need the same types of supports.

These people can help with things like

- Resolving issues with independent living (e.g. how and where to move, whether and where to continue education, making larger purchases)
- Inviting young people to spend holidays with them or celebrating other important milestones (e.g. birthdays, graduations, etc.)

#### **Relationships Take Time**

Person-centered work takes time. For youth in foster care, building a relationship and establishing trust with someone in the community can take a while, especially with youth who have had few to no trusting relationships.

Some tips for building trust in a relationship with a young person include

- Mean what you say: Deliver on what you say you will do or explain why you cannot if circumstances change. Don't over-promise on things beyond your control.
- Maintain regular contact: Meet with the young person regularly and talk with them about their interests, hopes, and fears.
- Have high expectations: Expect strong performance in school and make sure the young person has the support they need to achieve it. Work with the young person's team to make sure they meet and exceed expectations in social situations, at home, and during work experiences.



## Building Bridges Between Professionals

Services have traditionally been based on diagnoses and “problems” to be “cured.” This mode of service delivery has created separate service systems that each specialize in their own types of challenges.

In New York, for example, there are separate systems for children in foster care, people with developmental disabilities and people with mental health challenges. There also are two systems that provide services across those groups, but have their own unique limitations on who they can serve: vocational rehabilitation and schools/educational institutions.



Often, young people in foster care don't fit neatly into any one service system. For example, youth with disabilities in foster care cannot receive OPWDD Services. OCFS has a separate service waiver from Medicaid called “Bridges to Health,” but these services are sometimes inadequate to cover the complex needs of young people with disabilities in foster care.

Also, young people in foster care who have disabilities may eventually transition to community living and need assistance from OPWDD and it is often helpful to talk through options with someone.

For this reason, it is important to begin and maintain relationships with knowledgeable professionals in other service systems. How? Look for opportunities for cross-systems discussions, like at a Transition Committee meeting run by the Regional Special Education Technical Assistance Service Centers in NY, or County Mental Health Single Point of Access Meetings (SPOA or for children, CSPOA) or if necessary, set up your own cross-systems discussion/collaborative group.

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