

MAGAZINE

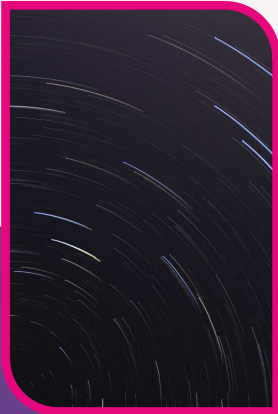
***Out of
This
World***
**A Guide
to Implementing
Grounded
Youth
Peer
Support**



YOUTH MOVE NATIONAL™

INTRO

This zine breaks down how to implement authentic youth peer support in agencies of care through the relationship between agency readiness, hiring, and retention. It's broken down into the following sections:



Out of This World

A Guide to Implementing Grounded Youth Peer Support

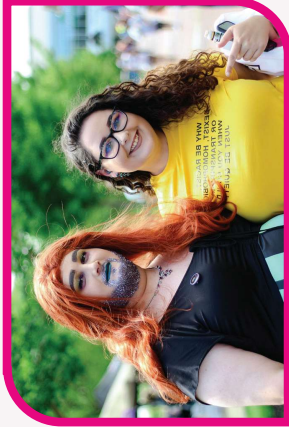


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- 1. YPS Today** **04-06**
Taking a look at the current state of youth peer support, learning about the importance of this role, examining some data, learning about the steps to take before implementation to achieve agency readiness, and watching a brief video on how YPS workers help their youth.

- 2. HIRING** **07-11**
Understanding the importance of the living wage and having a hiring process rooted in decolonization, examining data.

- 3. RETENTION** **12-15**
Defining turnover and learning how to combat it, understanding the importance of wellness checks and mental health support, watch a video on the relationship between YPS workers and their supervisors

- 4. WRAP-UP** **16-17**
Sharing some key takeaways from each section of Out of This World: A Guide to Implementing Grounded Youth Peer Support

- 5. ABOUT YOUTH MOVE** **18-19**
Want to know more about Youth MOVE National? Get the scoop on what we do and how to connect!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you so much Youth MOVE National and Youth MOVE change Initiative for allowing me to participate in this fellowship! Special thanks to Shayn, Tymber, Kristin, and Matt for all the support around my project. I genuinely couldn't have done this without you! And finally, thank you to all the youth peer support specialists out there who help their youth reach for the stars.

- Nakiya Lynch

It's not enough to wish on the stars, you have to reach for them.

Agencies of care actively encourage their youth to reach for the stars, especially as they get older. Young people are told to take advantage of programs and funds that could be beneficial to them in the long run. Assistance in areas such as driving, applying for college, budgeting, and even grocery shopping are all available with a simple phone call to their social worker. A study done by the US General Accounting Office found that the turnover rates of child welfare staff are between 30 and 40 percent nationwide. That means almost half of child welfare staff across the country leave their positions to be replaced by someone else in an endless cycle of training and losing new workers. Before those staff can be replaced, their caseloads are divided amongst the remaining workers, which leads to excessive workloads and burned-out workers. All those accessible resources fade to the backburner, and oftentimes so do their older youth.

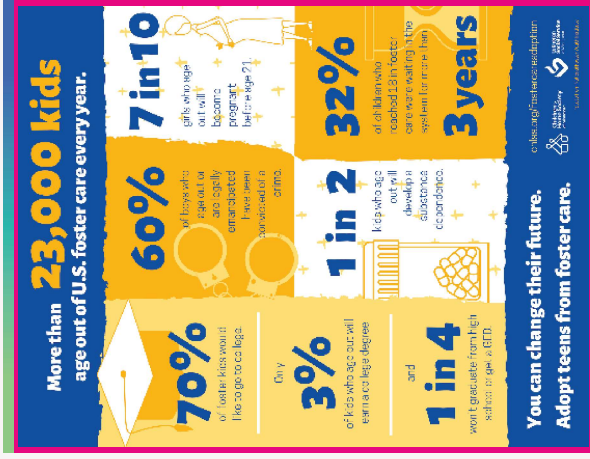
As a result, youth who are aging out of care now have to deal with losing the support of their network within the agency—on top of losing the support of the system overall. That's where youth peer support specialists come in. They're able to guide these young people through the transition from care to aging out, and to assist them with achieving their goals, while also supporting them emotionally through the sometimes traumatic experience of aging out.

However, agencies cut funding to Youth Peer Support (YPS) programs at an alarming rate. Youth peer support work is seen as optional, instead of as the fundamental need it is. Systems of care rely on their vulnerable youth the most, using their stories to receive funding that never goes to the programs they actually need. Agencies will build up these youth with advisory boards, speaking opportunities, and promises of change—only to quickly cut the programs they need the most after a few months to a year. This turbulent relationship between youth and the system can lead to a lack of trust between them, but even worse—to loss of hope and faith in life itself. This can lead to higher rates of [drug abuse](#), [survival sex work](#), and [homelessness](#).



Youth peer support work is seen as optional, instead of as the fundamental need it is

If we don't cultivate a safe space for our youth, they will be left constantly seeking affirmation from unsafe spaces. Youth who are failed by the system go down a dark path, leading to lives of pain and misfortune... According to the following infographic from a 2019 study done by The National Foster Youth Institute, while 70% of former foster youth would like to attend college—only 3% will actually earn a college degree post-care.



FOSTER YOUTH

70% of former foster youth would like to attend college. Only 3% will actually earn a college degree post-care.

The world can be a cruel place for Black and LGBTQ+ youth, and adding the intersection of the foster youth experience to those identities can make it not only cruel, but isolating. Having youth peer support specialists does more than help these young people age out—they give them hope and empower them in a world that undermines their humanity. Having youth peer support shows these youth that they're capable of making it out of the system successfully, can function in the 'normal' adult world, and can even inspire others in the same way their mentors do. Youth peer specialists are a necessity if we are to push this work forward; they enable the community to be served by the community, which helps agencies address current needs in an efficient way, and keeps our most vulnerable youth from slipping through the cracks.

Unfortunately, YPS programs currently implemented today suffer from a lack of authenticity. They don't serve their youth from a decolonized framework, treat relationships between agencies and specialists as transactional, and don't pay their specialists a living wage.

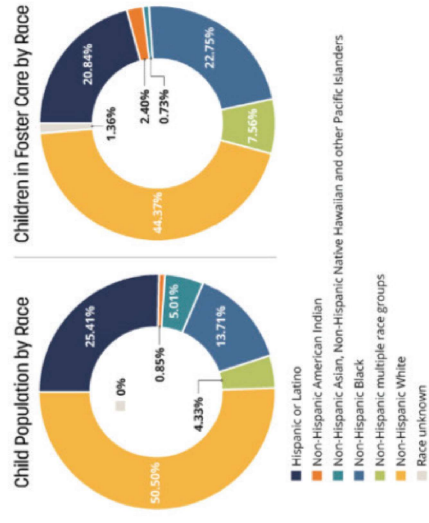
YPS TODAY

The implementation of youth peer support specialists can literally be a matter of life and death

With this graph from The Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2018, we can see that children of color make up over half of the foster youth population. So we can conclude that these youth are already dealing with the trauma of racism and oppression, the trauma of care, and now the trauma of aging out. With no support system, and no one to look up to who's survived similar circumstances and managed to be successful— these hopeless youth turn to substance use, crime, and even suicide. Research done by the University of Manitoba in 2011 found that foster youth are over 3 times more likely to have attempted suicide by the time they've aged out.

An [LGBTQ+ - Children's Rights study](#) done in 2019 found that 30.4% of youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ+ and 5% as transgender. Another study done by the [Trevor Project](#) found that 42% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the last year, 21% of those youth being Black.

The Numbers



Decolonization refers to the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches. On the one hand, decolonization involves dismantling structures that perpetuate the status quo, problematizing dominant discourses, and addressing unbalanced power dynamics. Decolonization necessitates shifting our frames of reference with regard to the knowledge we hold; examining how we have arrived at such knowledge. Source: [Indigenization, Decolonization, and Reconciliation – Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers](#) (opentextbc.ca)

PART II

THE HIRING PROCESS

So what about the hiring process? This is where most agencies immediately fail at implementing authentic youth peer support. In order to set the foundation for successful implementation, organizations need to commit to the hiring process from a decolonized perspective. But for most agencies, the entire process will be rooted in white supremacy—which is not only terrible, but leads to ineffective care when serving communities of color. Source: [Sex, Race, and Ethnic Diversity of U.S. Health Occupations](#) (2011-2015) (hrsa.gov) - 2009-3-3, [Demographics of the U.S. psychology workforce](#) (apa.org)

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced”
- James Baldwin

In order to analyze and decolonize your hiring process, take the following questions into consideration:

The phrase 'the entire hiring process will be rooted in white supremacy' may seem a little strong, but it's 100% accurate. Oppressive ideologies and barriers like ableism, racism, and stingy capitalistic pay rates are all inherently white supremacist—and for many agencies, the foundation of their hiring process.

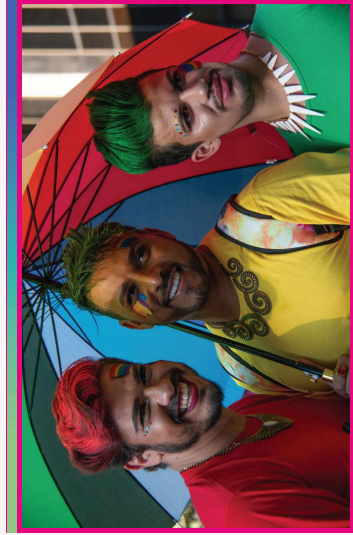
Another barrier during the hiring process is the certification process. If you require a certification from your youth peers, you could be training them before they've even started working for you. According to Mental Health America, their national peer certification requires a minimum of 40 hours of training and 3,000 hours of supervised work or volunteer experience providing direct peer support. Their process to hire and train a youth peer support specialist also includes 100% attendance and participation in 3 full days of training, 11 months of individual & group coaching, a \$225 application fee, \$200 examination fee, and Quarterly Professional Development/ Technical Assistance (PD/TA) meetings. That's over 125 days of unpaid work for a job they're not even guaranteed to get. In order to have a truly equitable hiring process, you must compensate your interviewees for all their time—not just the time they rack up on the clock after getting the job.

How is your job posting being advertised, and where?

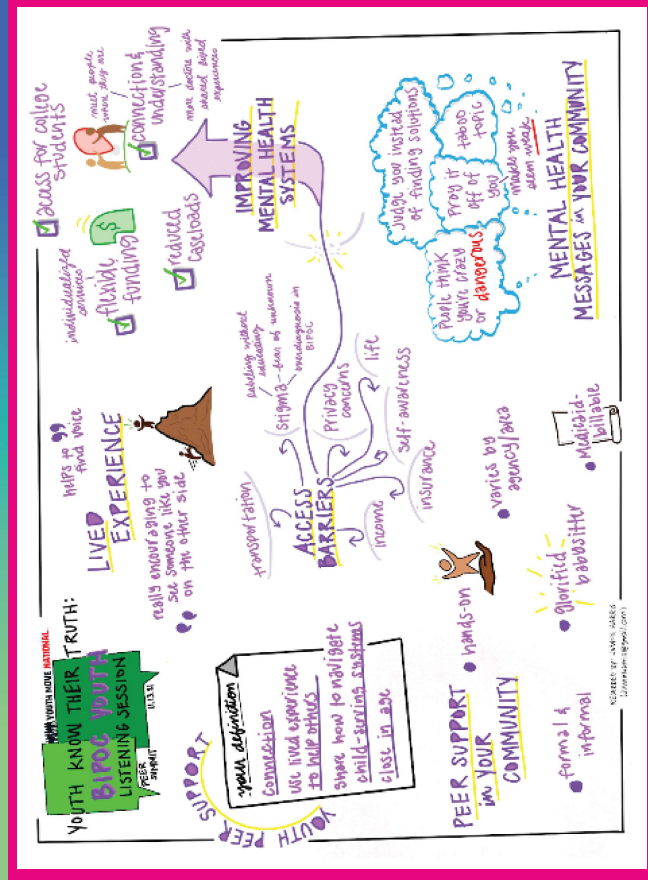
Is your job posting only in English?

Are there accommodations for people with physical and intellectual disabilities?

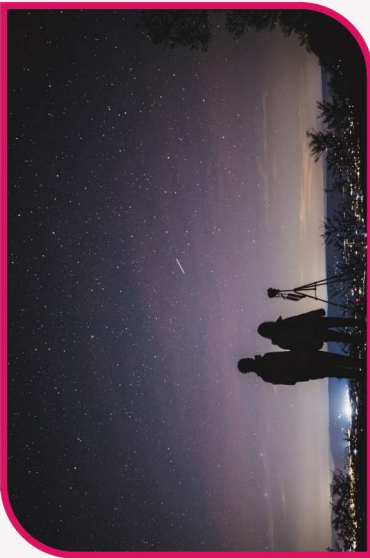
Is your pay rate equitable and would someone be able to survive on that rate in the current economy and cost of living in your area?



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In an interview with Youth MOVE National, while expressing their concerns about their position, a youth peer support specialist identified that their ideal wage would be twenty-five dollars an hour. In another study hosted by the same organization, half of the youth peer specialists interviewed identified that they make about seventeen dollars and fifty cents an hour. The other half identified were making around ten dollars an hour. This is **UNACCEPTABLE**.

constellation conversation

Let's take a dive into our Constellation Conversation—a visual interview hosted by Youth MOVE National with a current YPS specialist.



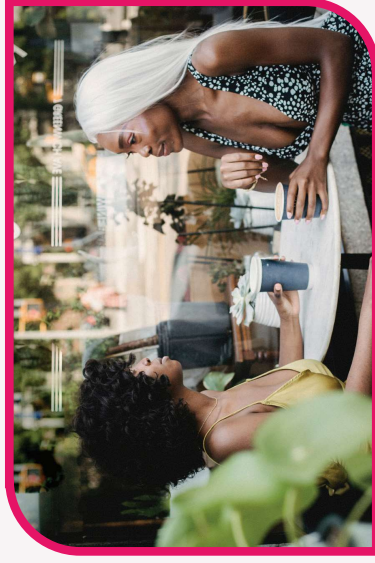
constellation

In doing emotional work with lived experience, where the work environment can be both challenging and triggering, it's important to **MAKE SURE YOUR YOUTH PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS ARE PAID A LIVABLE WAGE**. Being honest about the responsibilities and wage during the hiring process is **KEY** to the foundation of your relationship with your young adults. In a study conducted by Youth MOVE National for this project, half of the YPS specialists identified with feeling unfairly compensated for their work.

If youth peers don't feel fairly compensated, they can struggle with burnout and lack of motivation, which can lead to the decline of the quality of their work. This ultimately leads to high turnover in these positions—this isn't ideal as youth involved in systems are often already experiencing a revolving door of providers and we want YPS to be a safe respite—a place where youth feel they have someone to connect with that is reliable, consistent, reliable, etc. Specialists can't fully show up to their job if they don't make enough money to afford food. Trying to focus on work while hungry, worrying about housing, and being overall stuck in survival mode when attempting to offer genuine support for their peers is near impossible. This decline in work quality can lead to this work as a whole not being taken seriously within your agency, which can impact the ability to receive funding, which can lead back to not being able to fairly compensate your YPS specialists. It's a **VICIOUS CYCLE** that **ENDS** with workers being **FAIRLY COMPENSATED**, and agencies being transparent during the hiring process.



conversation



SECTION III

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” – Audra Lorde



RETENTION in peer support

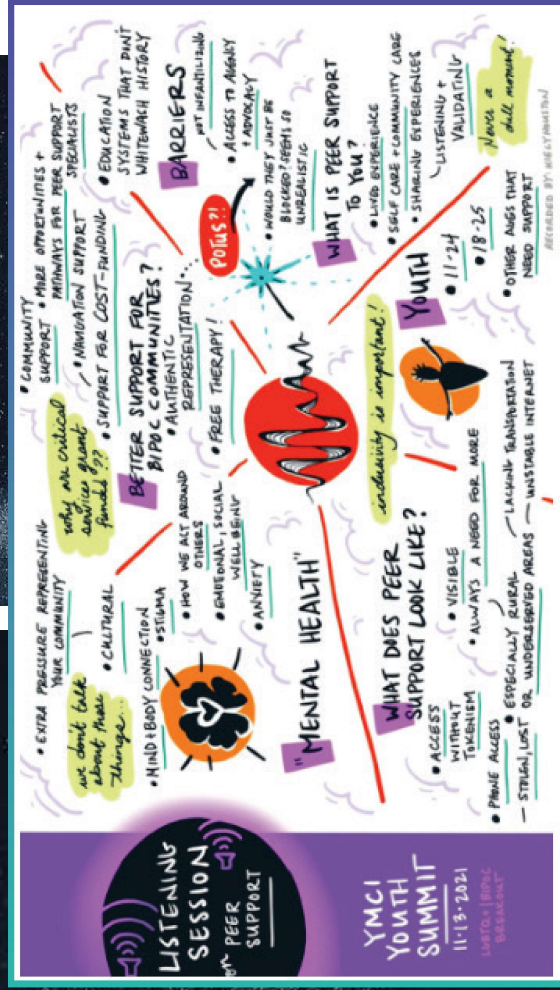
YOUTH VOICE

Encouraging and promoting **WELLNESS** is critical to implementing youth peer support. With YPS specialists today facing issues such as lack of agency or community support, high caseloads, **TRIGGERING** work environments, and being unfairly compensated—it's easy for their mental health to fall on the back burner. But when youth peer support specialists neglect their mental health, this can be reflected within the overall implementation of peer support, and it contributes to high turnover rates.

Turnover is defined as the rate in which employees leave their organization and are replaced. Issues with turnover can lead to open slots, unfair workloads, burnout, and therefore even more issues with turnover. Agencies of care tend to experience higher rates of turnover, especially youth peer support positions. This can be easily nipped in the bud by establishing and emphasizing the importance of wellness, and implementing wellness checks between YPS specialists and their supervisors.

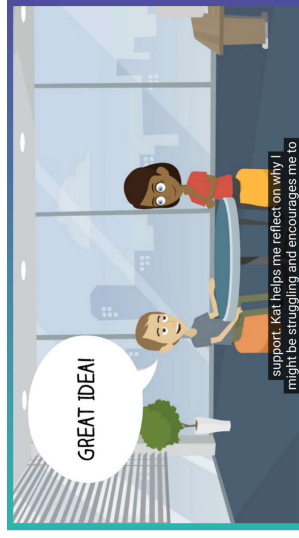
Supervisors

Supervisors can help YPS specialists draft and implement self care strategies, as well as work through triggering events in the field. Let's take a look at a video that highlights the importance of this dynamic.



Video Resource

Monthly Minute: Effective Support for Youth Peer Providers. [View video here.](#)



WRAP-UP

YPS TODAY TAKEAWAYS

The implementation of youth peer support is a matter of life and death that should be taken very seriously.

In order to guarantee agency readiness: Ensure you secure sustainable funding

RETENTION TAKEAWAYS

Curating an authentic relationship between your team and your youth peers and their supervisors is vital for implementing successful youth peer support. This can be achieved through:

- Listening sessions
- Wellness checks
- Creating a self-care plan with YPS.

HIRING TAKEAWAYS

Your hiring process must be authentic in order for your work to be authentic and effective to the communities you serve. You must advertise in spaces that are accessible to the communities you serve. You must have a hiring process free from ableism, inaccessibility, and racism— otherwise it is rooted in white supremacy.



1. YMCI

This zone was produced under the Youth MOVE Change Initiative fellowship program as an effort to elevate LGBTQIA2S+ & BIPOC voices in the peer workforce. [More Info](#)

2. CHAPTERS

There are more than 60 Youth MOVE chapters all across the U.S. and each one is focusing on the individual needs of their own community. [Find a Chapter](#)

3. PEER CENTER

Our Peer Center focuses on supporting the peer workforce through training, support, and coaching. [More Info](#)

4. YOUTH OPPS

Through our leadership academy, advisory councils, youth voice projects, Rockstar program, and more, we find ways to connect youth with national opps. [More Info](#)

5. ORG SUPPORT

We provide technical assistance, support, and coaching to organizations looking to assess, promote, and expand youth voice in their orgs. [More Info](#)

ABOUT YOUTH MOVE

YOUTH MOVE NATIONAL

Youth MOVE National is a youth-driven, chapter-based organization dedicated to uniting the voices of youth nationwide. Founded in 2007 and officially registered as an independent 501(c)(3) organization in 2013, we've grown to more than 60 chapters all around the country. You can read more about how we were founded in our history page.

We believe strongly that youth are the leaders of today, not tomorrow, all youth should be equal partners in the process of change; and that youth can motivate others through their voices of experience.

Do you have a question, request for information, help, or technical assistance?

[Request Help Here!](#)

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(Click the icons to go to our pages)

