

Maryland Youth Matter Practice Model



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WHAT IS THE MARYLAND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE MODEL?

The Youth Engagement Practice Model is specifically designed to focus on addressing the needs, and ensuring the involvement, of youth (ages, 14-21) who come to the attention of Maryland's child welfare system. As an extension of Maryland's Family Centered Practice Model, the Youth Engagement Model is centered on assuring the safety, well-being and permanency of every child, while building on the strengths of family and community to meet the child's needs. Most recently, the challenges facing older youth in the child welfare system have significantly changed the well being and positive permanency outcomes after exiting care. The state of Maryland's Social Services Administration created a practice model to establish a partnership between youth and child-serving staff to ensure concerted efforts are made to assist the youth in achieving permanency, establishing a positive network of supportive adults, and attaining the life skills to be self sufficient after exiting the child welfare system. The Social Services Administration hopes this Model will be the catalyst for child welfare administrators, staff and providers to pay close attention to the lens used to view young people, and the role we play in supporting them as they launch into adulthood.

WHY FOCUS EFFORTS ON THE YOUTH POPULATION

Each year, approximately 20,000, young adults age out of the child welfare system ("Child Welfare Information Gateway", 2010). Many of these adults exit the system without the skills, education, or resources to become self sufficient. Their outcomes often reflect homelessness, unplanned pregnancies, incomplete education, drug use, and crime. Currently, in the state of Maryland, over half of the child welfare population is between the ages of 14 and 21 (Maryland CHESSIE, 2010). Given state-specific data, the need for greater preparation and positive supports to assist older youth in their transition into adulthood is imperative. Maryland wants to ensure all youth are ready to contribute to society as productive citizens by age 21.

MARYLAND'S PERSPECTIVE

Soliciting youth input and listening to their concerns are of vital importance to improving life outcomes. As a state child welfare agency, the Social Services Administration recognizes that youth are most directly impacted by the child welfare decisions made on their behalf. It is also understood that the treatment of a young person by a child welfare system has implications for the duration of that young person's life. As an expert on their own lives, youth must be considered partners in the child welfare decision making process. Failing to properly engage youth in life decisions can have an adverse effect on both child welfare and the larger community.

All levels of the child welfare system and community partners have a responsibility for communicating realistic options to young people and negotiating reasonable alternatives.

Regardless of their jurisdiction, all youth in Maryland should receive consistent services, a quality standard of resources and comparable child welfare experiences. Child welfare interventions and service planning with youth must consider their immediate needs, and assure that services are designed to prepare them to be self-sufficient and connected to a support system after child welfare services have ended.

The mission of Maryland's Youth Engagement Practice model is to improve services to youth in Maryland's child welfare system and draw on the experiences and recommendations of youth to enhance child welfare policy and practice.

HOW THE MODEL WAS DEVELOPED

The Department of Human Resources' Social Services Administration made intense efforts to engage internal and external partners throughout the model development. Two major groups, the Project Team and the Steering Committee, are responsible for shaping the content and leading the development process. Collectively, the groups comprised of current and former foster youth, families, service providers, executive leadership, local child welfare department staff, child-serving agency staff and community leaders. Within seven months, after monthly meetings and several conversations with Youth Advisory Boards around the state, the model was formed.

VISION

All child welfare staff in Maryland are equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools to help youth transition into adulthood as productive citizens; and all youth are actively engaged in making decisions about their lives.

GOALS

The goals of the Maryland Youth Engagement Practice Model are to:

- Create clear and consistent policies & practice standards to guide our work with youth within Maryland's child welfare system
- Increase efforts to ensure youth in Maryland:
 - Are involved and engaged as partners throughout service planning and delivery
 - Accomplish positive goals
 - Achieve permanent connections
 - Acquire the skills to become self-sufficient adults
- Enhance child welfare staff's capacity to work with youth more effectively
- Enhance organizational capacity to support staff working with youth
- Increase youth participation and incorporate youth voice in all aspects of the child welfare continuum (e.g. policy development, department trainings)

- Construct a process to ensure existing youth-related policies and strategies outlined by the Social Services Administration and Maryland's Ready by 21 Initiative are embedded in practice

KEY OUTCOMES

The Social Services Administration aims to improve youth well being through the following key outcomes. Key Indicators are included for evaluation purposes.

Desired Outcomes	Key Indicators
Youth acquire and demonstrate the necessary life skills to become self-sufficient.	Increased number of youth who exit the child welfare system and become productive adults.
Youth establish and maintain permanent connections to a network of supportive adults and peers.	Increased number of youth exiting the child welfare system with a network of community, peer, and adult support.
Youth are empowered to advocate for themselves and actively participate in service planning and delivery.	Increased number of youth participating in youth advisory boards across the state. Increased youth participation in the development, review, and enhancement of child welfare practice and policy.

CORE VALUES & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following core values and principles guide youth-related practice in the state of Maryland.

- Respect** Youth and staff must treat each other with honor and dignity. Mutual cooperation is encouraged to ensure that youth and staff are able to work together in a respectful, courteous manner to address the needs and goals of the youth.
- Value** Youth voice and perspective is important. All efforts and accomplishments are celebrated. The thoughts and ideas of youth help facilitate improved services and resources to meet individual needs and goals.
- Inclusion** Youth have a right to be included in all decisions about their future. Youth participation is encouraged in all planning and decision making processes deemed developmentally appropriate.
- Advocacy** Youth will develop the skills, through education and opportunities, to give voice to their opinions, advocate for themselves, and become leaders in their communities.

Empowerment Youth matter in Maryland. Their roles as experts in their lives is understood and valued. By keeping youth informed, building on their strengths, and providing the space and responsibility to make their own decisions, youth are encouraged to reach their full potential.

Support Youth are assisted in creating a network of support, made up of caring individuals who will provide lifelong connections.

CORE STRATEGIES

The following strategies are essential to ensuring youth in Maryland's child welfare system are fully engaged and have the resources and supports necessary to meet their full potential. The integration of these strategies into a purposeful plan of activities helps facilitate an organizational and practice culture in which the voice of youth is recognized and reflected in policy and practice.

Youth Advisory Boards

The Social Services Administration and local departments develop state and local youth advisory boards (YAB's) as a vehicle to:

- Foster a network of support amongst youth in care;
- Give voice to youth's successes, issues and concerns within the local departments; and,
- Obtain youth's recommendations on child welfare policy and practice.

Through involvement on a youth advisory board, youth build leadership skills and are empowered to share their perspectives for their benefit and others. The Social Services Administration and local departments use the feedback and recommendations from youth to improve the worker-youth relationship and ensure youth receive needed resources and services.

Family Involvement Meetings

Family involvement meetings (FIMs) are convened to engage youth and families in making critical decisions with the child welfare system. FIMs provide a forum for youth and families to be active partners in discussing child welfare involvement.

Youth are invited to attend all FIMs and youth understand the purpose of the FIM prior to the meeting. Meetings regarding the life of a young person should be youth-driven and family guided. Youth should actively contribute to the conversations with child welfare staff, family, and community partners around the following key decision making points:

- Removal or Considered Removal
- Placement Change
- Recommendation for Permanency Change
- Youth Transitional Plan

- Voluntary Placement Agreement

Community Partnerships

The Social Services Administration and local departments' partner with community stakeholders to expand the resources and supports available to youth who come to the attention of Maryland's child welfare system. Local schools, organizations, businesses, community leaders and residents share responsibility for the successful outcomes of youth in their community. In collaboration with the community, local departments will ensure an environment where resources and opportunities are made available so youth can reach their full potential.

Transitional Youth Services

All youth, starting at age 14, will begin to receive services and supports tailored to their individual needs. In preparation for adulthood, local departments will:

- o Develop service plans with youth to define youth's needs and goals
- o Annually administer a state approved assessment tool to identify a youth's strengths and skill level to successfully complete their transition plan
- o Provide youth with opportunities to learn and practice life skills through placement and independent living life skills classes

Organizational Assessment/Monitoring/Evaluation

The importance of organizational capacity and the ongoing assessment of policy and practice are as relevant to the youth engagement model as it is to the statewide Family-Centered Practice Model. All levels of the child welfare organization must work to develop and adopt practice standards that enhance the functioning of families and improve the safety, well-being and permanence outcomes for youth. Administrative leaders must promote opportunities for professional growth and establish workloads that will allow caseworkers and supervisors to reasonably manage services delivered to youth and families. There will be a continuous process for analyzing data trends to refine the policies and procedures that direct practice. Youth are involved throughout this process to provide feedback and recommendation that ensure quality of service.

STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

The Youth Engagement Model's standards of practice provide a framework for how the Social Services Administration works with youth throughout the course of their involvement with Maryland's child welfare system. A child welfare practice standard is a reference point for the planning, service delivery, and evaluation of how services are provided to children

and families in the child welfare system. The practice standards for the Youth Engagement Model are designed to:

- Provide guidance to caseworkers, supervisors, administrators, and other direct service providers on practices that promote positive outcomes for youth
- Establish consistency in practice with youth across the state
- Share expected levels of performance for all staff, partners, providers, and agencies working with youth in Maryland's child welfare system.

Aligning with Maryland's Family Centered Practice Model, the youth engagement practice standards are divided into six practice concepts outlined as the agency's model of practice—Engagement, Teaming, Assessment, Planning, Intervening and Monitoring/Reassessment.



This model of practice represents the Social Services Administrations' continuous process to achieve desired outcomes for the children, youth and families served.

ENGAGEMENT

- Standard 1: The caseworker will establish a relationship with the youth by initiating conversations about the youth's self-identified interests, goals and needs.
- Standard 2: The caseworker will ask for input from, and listen to the perspective and opinions of, youth regarding matters that impact the youth's life.
- Standard 3: The caseworker will maintain regular contact with the youth, at minimum once per month, to provide consistent contact and allot time for ongoing discussions about the youth's well-being, interest, needs and goals.
- Standard 4: The caseworker will recognize and acknowledge the youth's strengths. In addition, the caseworker will work with the youth to identify, develop, and value his/her personal strengths.

CORE VALUES:

Advocacy, Empowerment, Inclusion Respect, Support & Value

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Respect the youth as an individual person; refrain from generalizing all youth by age or behaviors
2. Acknowledge the youth's sense of loss and the challenge of removal & transition
3. Be understanding and patient
4. Understand normal teenage behavior
5. Encourage the youth to ask questions and be open and honest in your responses to the youth
6. Maintain regular contact with youth; be available and follow through on commitments made to the youth
7. Seek relevant and appropriate family history from youth
8. Use youth friendly language to ensure youth understands and can follow the conversation
9. Listen

YOUTH RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Engage in conversations with your caseworker—he or she is there to assist you while in foster care
2. Don't be afraid to ask questions and request information
3. Offer your input on matters concerning your life—your suggestions will be valuable as you and your caseworker map out your future plans
4. Share ideas and goals with your caseworker so he or she can get to know you—if your caseworker knows you well, he/she will be able to assist you easier
5. Share your connections to family and supportive adults—local departments want you to stay connected to your support system

TEAMING

- Standard 1: The caseworker will work closely with youth, families, caregivers, foster parents, child welfare staff and community partners to create a team of relevant people who are committed to the well being and support of the youth. This teaming process will begin upon local department receiving a call for assistance concerning the safety and well being of a youth.
- Standard 2: The caseworker will involve youth in all decision making processes throughout the life of a youth's time in care.
- Standard 3: The caseworker and youth will work collectively to outline and accomplish the tasks identified in the youth's service plan.
- Standard 4: The caseworker will partner with community organizations and local businesses to provide opportunities for youth to develop life skills and establish a network of positive supportive adults.
- Standard 5: Caseworkers will assist youth in identifying and developing a network of positive supportive adults and/or organizations within the community to provide additional support to the youth as they move toward self-sufficiency.
- Standard 6: The caseworker will ensure youth, family members, foster parents and other key stakeholders are given an opportunity to express their opinions or concerns.

CORE VALUES:

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STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Ensure that the opinions and concerns of all involved parties are taken into account when developing service plans.
2. Demonstrate a willingness to compromise when discussing the opinions and concerns of the youth.
3. Facilitate and foster a meaningful dialogue with the youth even when there is a dissimilarity of opinion.
4. Encourage youth, family, and foster parents to participate in discussions as partners in assessing the needs, planning services and making decisions.
5. Support youth by acknowledging and embracing their personal strengths

YOUTH RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Share hopes and dreams with your caseworker. Your caseworker is available to help you with your goals.
2. Ask your caseworker any questions you may have about foster care, your life, services or needs. Remember, caseworkers are available to assist you while in care.
3. Know how to disagree without being disagreeable.
4. Demonstrate respect for others and expect the same for one's self
5. Work with your caseworker and/or local department staff to address your needs, identify resources and work toward your goals
6. Listen to the ideas and concerns of your caseworker and other local department staff – they can offer suggestions that can be beneficial to you.
7. No question is a dumb question—Don't be afraid to ask for more information if you don't understand something

ASSESSMENT

- Standard 1: The caseworker will identify the youth's strengths and needs, utilizing information gathered from the youth, caregivers/lover parent(s), the state administered assessment tool and comprehensive assessments, to discern critical issues and coordinate the most appropriate interventions for the youth.
- Standard 2: The caseworker will ask youth of his/her self-identified needs, goals and areas of interest.
- Standard 3: The caseworker will acknowledge and consider the youth's culture as needs and resources are identified.
- Standard 4: The caseworker will include youth in all developmentally appropriate assessments to ensure youth understand the purpose of each assessment and the youth's perspective is included in the final analysis of strengths, areas of needs and services.
- Standard 5: During monthly visits with the youth, the caseworker will observe youth's overall well-being, and assess the youth's progress toward the Ready by 21 Benchmarks.

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STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Meet regularly with youth to gather information about interests, vocational goals, abilities, social supports, housing, health history, etc.
2. Understand the different mental health needs of the youth and implement strategies to assist youth facing these challenges
3. Don't assume a youth's age aligns with his/her cognitive ability
4. Monitor youth's over all well-being during monthly visits—demeanor, physical characteristics, affect, social skills
5. Ask questions of the youth to find out how he or she is doing in socially, physically, mentally and academically
6. Be transparent with youth about identified needs obtained from the assessments and offer service options available to assist youth
7. Work with youth to evaluate, and identify action steps to achieve, developmental milestones listed in the Benchmarks Policy
8. Take into account the issues, challenges and difficulties youth experience before and after entering foster care
9. Be attentive & listen to what youth are saying

YOUTH RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Ask for clarification on issues and questions that are not clear
2. Share your perspective and ideas
3. Reflect on your situation and ask for assistance if needed; Tell your caseworker and local department staff what you need and want
4. View identified areas of "need" as opportunity for growth
5. Remember—Each assessment and/or question asked is designed to help your caseworker figure out what resources you need while in care
6. Listen to and strongly consider the recommendations and options staff offer—they have experience working in the field and are aware of resources that may be helpful

PLANNING

- Standard 1: The caseworker and youth will work together at all stages of designing and implementing service plans. Caseworkers will prepare youth for the development of his or her plan by explaining the purpose, process and benefits of a service plan.
- Standard 2: Beginning at age 14, the caseworker and youth will engage in a detailed conversation to complete the Maryland Youth Transitional Plan. This plan, which outlines preparations for the youth's life after foster care, will be reviewed by the caseworker and the youth every 180 days after the youth's 17th birthday.
- Standard 3: The caseworker will create ongoing opportunities for youth to express their opinion and perspective on individual needs, and desired services to develop a service plan that includes youth-identified goals, objectives, and responsibilities for outcomes.
- Standard 4: The case worker will prepare youth for all Family Involvement Meetings prior to the meetings by explaining the purpose, participants, respective roles and responsibilities and use of pertinent information. Meetings will be held at a time and place that will assure youth availability.
- Standard 5: The caseworker will inform youth of the Ready by 21 Benchmarks and assist youth in applying the standards to their individual service plans.
- Standard 6: The caseworker will support youth in setting realistic, achievable goals and developing action steps to work towards those goals.
- Standard 7: The caseworker will assist youth in creating a network of support that includes family members and/or other positive adults, community resources, and peers.

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STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Create all the written service plans based on the suggestions discussed by you and the youth.
2. Provide youth an opportunity to ask questions and consider options at any point during the process of developing the service plans.
3. Ensure youth are fully informed of their options.
4. Create opportunities for youth to meaningfully participate in the development of plans and any meetings concerning their life.
5. Assist youth in identifying and inviting family members, foster parents, placement providers, other caring adults, community resources and peers to attend the FIMs.
6. Assist youth in making progress towards achieving the goals written in the service plans.
7. Work with youth to write service goals
8. Be sure to always ask youth for their input
9. Inform youth of every FIM meeting in advance of the meeting
10. Discuss the strengths and challenges youth should consider in developing realistic goals for their service plans

YOUTH RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Participate in meetings concerning your life. You are an expert on your life so your opinions, suggestions and ideas are valuable in meetings. **Speak up!**
2. Ask for dates of your FIMs and attend meetings whenever possible
3. Commit to following the service plan that you designed with your caseworker.
4. Seek out, and take advantage of, the resources provided by local department staff
5. Work towards achieving the Ready by 21 benchmarks & your short/long term goals
6. It's never too early to start thinking about your future and planning for your life after foster care--work with your caseworker to create your transitional plan: even if you don't plan to remain in foster care much longer, it will be extremely helpful.

INTERVENING

- Standard 1: Caseworkers will work with youth and foster parents to implement appropriate services and resources based on an assessment of the youth's strengths and needs.
- Standard 2: Caseworkers will develop a strategy for crisis interventions that is realistic to the youth's situation, and provides opportunity for youth to understand the dynamics of the situation, its impact on his or her goals, and long-term consequences or advantages.
- Standard 3: The caseworker will assist youth in reaching their full potential by helping the youth consider their options regarding their life, the advantages and disadvantages of achieving their identified goals, and opportunities to resolve recognized challenges or conflicts.
- Standard 4: The caseworker will support youth in developing, and valuing their personal strengths and goals

CORE VALUES:

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STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Encourage a focused discussion with youth on the results of the youth's assessment and the need for a specific intervention
2. Offer additional support and resources (advocacy or community-based) to address the identified barriers and needs.
3. Be transparent with youth about the needs identified from the administered assessments
4. Engage in a discussion with the youth about your recommended interventions and your reasoning for those recommendations
5. Allow space for youth to consider their options and make decisions—We must help youth develop their skill in wise decision making
6. Respect and value the youth's perspective
7. If feasible, provide options and case scenarios to youth so youth can develop the capacity understand alternatives and make sound decisions
8. Be patient with the process of adolescence—recognize that youth will make mistakes and all youth are not perfect but will need the assistance of their caseworker to overcome possible hurdles in life

YOUTH RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Discuss possible interventions you're your caseworker; if possible, get involved in identifying and planning the intervention that is best for you
2. Participate in the intervention provided; it was chosen to better serve your needs.
3. Remember your voice and feedback is valuable to better serving your needs and the needs of others in care
4. Strongly consider the options presented to you by your caseworker and strive to make good decisions. Understand there are consequences both positive and negative for your choices and actions
5. If you don't feel comfortable or don't understand something, tell your caseworker and/or another trusted local department staff member—they are available to assist you and ensure your safety

MONITORING AND REASSESSMENT

- Standard 1: The caseworker, youth and foster parent will track and acknowledge the progress made in completing certain tasks. The caseworker and youth will discuss additional services or resources required to assist the youth in achieving their goals, utilizing service plans during monthly visits.
- Standard 2: Supervisors and caseworkers will continuously observe and assess youth's success with achieving short-term goals. At minimum, monthly visits, treatment team meetings, and all Family Involvement Meetings will serve as an opportunity for ongoing observation and assessment. Observed progress will be reviewed and discussed with youth to inform future planning and assist youth in conducting self-assessments.
- Standard 3: The caseworkers will set aside time during monthly visits for youth to share their perspective on individual progress on their service plans, recommendations for changes in the child welfare system, and opinions on the effectiveness of services or interventions.

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STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Review the progress of all goals written in the service plans with the youth
2. Identify and evaluate the strengths and needs of youth during each visit
3. Regard the youth's input and time as worthy and useful
4. Encourage the youth to provide ongoing feedback to the caseworker, local department and state youth advisory board, on the services and resources received
5. Maintain regular contact with the youth and other team members to monitor the youth's progress by conducting visits, attending school conference, treatment team meetings and FIMs.

YOUTH RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Attend meetings and continue to share your thoughts and ideas regarding your life and services while in foster care
2. Be accountable for your own actions and consequences for the decisions that you make
3. Don't be derailed by setbacks, learn from your mistakes
4. Seek help in finding solutions to barriers and use it as an opportunity to learn strategies for addressing problems.
5. Provide feedback to your caseworker and local department staff of the service you receive
6. Connect with your local or state youth advisory board to provide recommendations on how to improve services for youth in foster care