QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER
ON ENGAGING YOUTH IN
FINDING PERMANENCY

WORKFORCE SCOPING LITERATURE REVIEW

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This report is supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling $4 million dollars with 100 percent funded by ACF/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit the ACF websites, Administrative and National Policy Requirements | The Administration for Children and Families (hhs.gov).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Quality Improvement Center on Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency (QIC-EY) is a cooperative agreement, funded by the Children's Bureau, charged with advancing child welfare programs and practices to ensure that children and youth in the child welfare system throughout the United States are authentically engaged in finding permanence. It is expected that the work of the QIC-EY will bring about systemic changes in how children and youth are authentically engaged as reflected in intentional policy, practice, and systems changes in the pilot sites. We believe that ensuring children and youth in care are authentically engaged, particularly as it relates to permanency, requires a paradigm shift in how the child welfare system understands and views their involvement in decision-making.

Specifically, this scoping literature review was conducted of peer-reviewed articles and gray literature that discussed how child welfare and/or court staff promote youth engagement. A total of 1,119 articles were reviewed. Of those, 981 were excluded because they didn't meet the inclusion criteria (did not relate to how staff can engage youth in service planning or related efforts) and 138 articles were fully

reviewed and included in the analysis. The reviewed articles were written in English, published after 1980, and had the full text available. The researchers used the PRISMA method to conduct the literature review and a framework analysis for developing themes (codes) for analysis.

This report details the findings from the scoping literature review and describes and defines the identified themes. See Table 1 for a list of all themes identified in the literature review. Researchers investigated three main categories during the review: competencies and characteristics of workers, court, and workforce support.

The results revealed seven competencies for child welfare workers (partnering with youth; communication and listening skills; building trusting relationships; strength-based approach; prepare and inform; advocate for youth; knowledge of adolescent development) and three characteristics (committed; flexibility; and self-awareness) of staff that support successful youth engagement. The QIC-EY Workforce Council also identified two essential characteristics not included in the literature review: demonstration of empathy and authenticity.

In addition, researchers identified six primary themes in the court category. These six primary themes of youth engagement in court include preparing youth for court, open communication, active listening, accommodate youth attendance at court, providing extra time, and encouraging youth's participation in court hearings.

Lastly, researchers identified five primary themes under the category of supporting the workforce to implement youth engagement approaches. These included providing coaching, supervision, peer support, supervisor observation, and involving youth in worker training.

In the discussion section, we discuss how we derived three main responsibilities of youth engagement workers from the core competencies and characteristics. These three responsibilities include the following: Inform, Elicit, and Partner.

Table 1. All themes identified in literature review

Competencies (see Table 2 for more information)	**Characteristics (see Table 2 for more information)**	**Court (see Table 3 for more information)**	**Workforce support (see Table 4 for more information)**
Partnering with youth	Committed	Preparing youth for court	Coaching
Communication and listening skills	Flexibility	Open communication	Supervision
Building trusting relationships	Self-awareness	Active listening	Peer support
Strength-based approach		Accommodate youth attendance	Supervisor observation
Preparing and informing youth		Providing extra time	Youth involvement in worker training
Advocating for youth		Encouraging youth participation	
Knowledge of adolescent development			

THE QIC-EY

The Quality Improvement Center on Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency (QIC-EY) is a five-year cooperative agreement funded by the Administration on Children, Youth & Families, Children Bureau. The five partner agencies include Spaulding for Children, Families Rising, the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors (NEACWCD), the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (UNL), and the University of Washington (UW). Spaulding is the Lead Agency.

The QIC-EY will select 6-8 pilot sites, states, counties, tribal nations, and territories during the first year of the project. Working in partnership with the sites, the QIC-EY will implement and evaluate authentic child and youth engagement models in the pilot sites and help the sites to make systemic changes necessary for child and youth engagement. The QIC-EY will also develop a training/coaching model for the workforce that focuses on learning the skills necessary for authentic child and youth engagement. This training/coaching model will be piloted in the sites, refined as needed, and then disseminated nationally. The training/coaching model will include capacity-building training, tools, and strategies that will serve as a change agent for the child

welfare workforce and system to embrace the voice of children and youth in all aspects of the system of care.

The QIC-EY is expected to bring systemic change that will be reflected through intentional policies, practices, and systems changes – at first, within the selected pilot sites and, later, to the nation at large. It is expected that the work of the QIC-EY will bring about systemic changes in how children and youth are authentically engaged as reflected in intentional policy, practice, and systems changes in the pilot sites. We believe that ensuring that children and youth in care are authentically engaged, particularly as it relates to permanency, requires a paradigm shift in how the child welfare system understands and views their involvement in decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the child welfare system's focus on legal permanency, many youth exit foster care without permanency. According to AFCARS Report #27, over 20,000 children who exited care during 2019 did so through emancipation. Additionally, almost 25,000 children in care in September 2019 had a case plan goal of emancipation or long-term foster care (Avery, 2010). Youth aging out of care often lack sufficient social support, which can serve as a protective factor against a number of negative outcomes including (but not limited to) homelessness and unemployment (Avery, 2010).

Prior research indicates that engaging youth in their own permanency planning improves permanency and transition-related outcomes while enhancing both child and agency wellbeing (Salazar, Spiera, & Pfister, 2020). Engaging youth in permanency planning allows youth to gain a sense of control in their own decision-making process and enhances their decision-making skills (Weisz et al., 2011). This collaborative engagement also improves academic performance and increases optimism, motivation, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Weisz et al., 2011). Youth value the fairness of the decision-making process over the decision itself, and when youth feel included and heard in these processes, their satisfaction and compliance with the outcome can increase (Weisz et al., 2011). This collaborative engagement proves to

be particularly important when working with older youth to find permanency. Child welfare agencies also benefit from engaging youth in services through the creation of more effective and relevant policies, programs and services, and improved relationships and understanding between staff and youth (Walker, Seibel, & Jackson, 2017). Youth involvement expands permanency options, resulting in fewer children leaving care without a connection to a stable, consistent adult (Salazar et al., 2018; Schwalbe, 2012).

However, despite the research demonstrating the effectiveness of youth engagement in permanency planning and youth interest in having a say in decisions that impact them, child welfare practice has not historically – nor presently – centered on youth voice or engagement (Saunders & Mace, 2006). Similarly, court processes can prove disempowering for children (Cashmere, 2002). The mindset among the child welfare workforce needs to adapt to see youth as partners. This change requires training and ongoing coaching on how to establish relationships with youth on their caseloads, engage them in decision making, and empower them to use their voice (Havlicek, Curry, & Villalpando, 2018). Creating shared power requires staff to see youth as experts who have important perspectives and innovative ideas to share. In addition, it is crucial to establish a norm of shared responsibility, control and accountability among staff and youth. Authentic youth engagement requires staff to dedicate time needed to establish a trusting relationship with youth, by listening to them, respecting their opinions and being consistently present and available.

To understand the best methods for training child welfare and court staff on youth engagement practices, it is important to understand the workforce competencies and characteristics associated with effective youth engagement as well as the coaching and supervisory factors

needed to promote these competencies and characteristics. As part of the Quality Improvement Center for Engaging Youth (QIC-EY), a cooperative agreement between Spaulding for Children and the Children's Bureau, the research team conducted a scoping literature review to understand effective components of youth engagement in child welfare, with particular focus on the essential worker competencies and characteristics that support youth engagement in permanency planning. The results revealed three primary responsibilities of youth engagement workers: informing, eliciting, and partnering with youth. Throughout the course of the partnership, workers may cycle between these actions, depending on what is needed in the moment to move the planning process forward.

METHODOLOGY

SEARCH STRATEGY AND SELECTION OF RECORDS

Researchers used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to conduct the review (Moher et al., 2009). Prior to the review of peer-reviewed articles and gray literature, the research team consulted with the QIC-EY Workforce Council and the Youth Engagement Advisory Council to create a comprehensive list of key words and terms. The Researchers combined feedback from the councils to create a full list of search terms that were then used to review peer-reviewed studies and gray literature reports, including governmental and organizational publications. The authors found records through several sources, including ERIC EBSCO, PsycInfo, Social Work Abstracts, Family Studies Abstracts, ERIC ProQuest (N=1104), personal correspondence with leaders in the field (N=13), and through reviewing any similar literature reviews found in the original database (N=2). The research team conducted the search in December 2021.

Inclusion criteria for the literature review required that the articles meet the following criteria: (1) published after 1980, (2) written in English, (3) the full text was available online, and (4) the article

discussed how staff promote youth engagement in planning efforts or activities. The initial database search revealed a total of 1104 records. Other sources (e.g., reviewers' personal knowledge, review of literature review sources uncovered in search) identified an additional 15 sources for a total of 1119 records considered for inclusion. The team then screened records for eligibility by analyzing titles, abstracts, and summaries. If the title or abstract did not mention youth engagement, or if it was a duplicate, the article was excluded. A total of 752 records that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

Four reviewers then completed a full text review of the remaining 367 records and assessed them for inclusion. Articles were kept in the review if they explained strategies to engage youth in programming, planning, or activities, and/or the competencies and characteristics that make child welfare professionals successful in engaging youth in these efforts or promoting legal, relational, or cultural permanency.

Articles were excluded if they only discussed outcomes associated with youth engagement, or if they did not include information about staff. After the first full text review, 207 additional articles were excluded due to lack of relevance to the topic and lack of available text. Two reviewers then completed a second full text review, which resulted in excluding 22 more articles due to lack of relevance to the topic. After this second full text review, 138 articles were selected for final inclusion.

THEME AND SUBTHEME CODING

To code the themes, the authors used a framework analysis approach (Goldsmith, 2021). A framework analysis includes a mix of inductive and deductive coding through a five-step process. First, the

researchers familiarized themselves with the data. In this research team, several of the members were already familiar with the literature through previous reviews, which enabled data familiarity and allowed them to suggest preliminary themes (codes). Themes were also suggested by other members of the QIC-EY grant team based on their expertise. The preliminary themes and their definitions created the initial framework for review.

Second, the reviewers had the freedom to add new thematic codes that were distinctly different from the preliminary themes. Additionally, the definitions of primary and secondary themes were added or modified when the existing categories did not sufficiently represent the material. Therefore, the framework was adjusted in an iterative process as the reviewers read the literature.

Third, researchers coded the articles in accordance with the pre-determined themes. After the initial review and adjusting the framework, the authors reviewed the full article list again to ensure each article was reviewed with the final framework, (all preliminary and added themes), and the definitions of each of the themes aligned with the literature.

Fourth, the researchers summarized the themes and frameworks provided in the data, which is detailed in the results section below. Fifth, researchers interpreted the results.

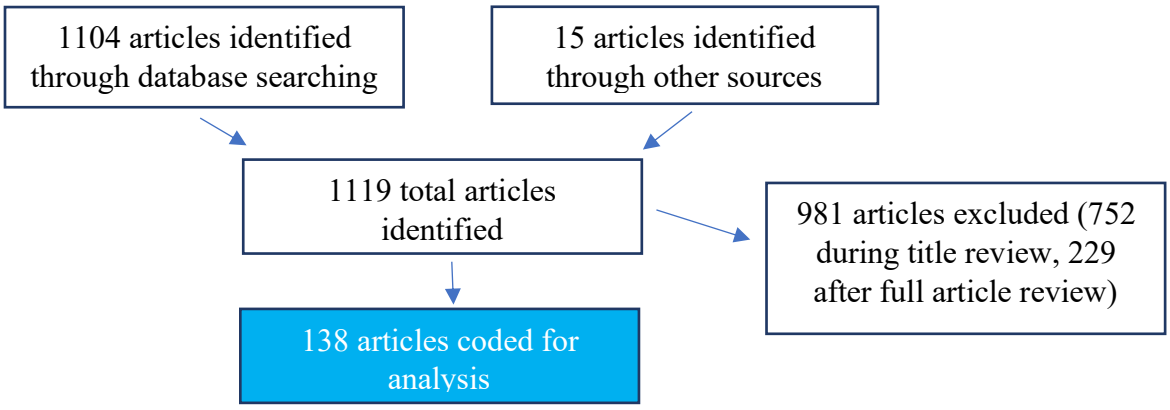
The results were separated into three major categories, which include staff characteristics/competencies, workforce support, and court-specific youth engagement. Characteristics are defined as personal attributes, features, or qualities that child welfare professionals have which make them more effective at implementing youth engagement approaches. Competencies are defined as knowledge, attitudes, and/or

skills that staff acquire through training. We define workforce support as the techniques staff, supervisors, and organizations employ to encourage personal and professional development and to implement new interventions with fidelity. Court-specific youth engagement is defined as youth engagement specifically occurring within the legal setting (primarily court).

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The final selection included articles published between 1982 and 2022 (one article did not have a date listed). The records included a total of 81 experimental studies (14 quantitative, 53 qualitative, 14 mixed methods), and 57 gray literature or opinion articles. The sample sizes in the experimental articles ranged from 1 (case study) to 1,325 participants. Quantitative articles had a median sample size of 187, while qualitative articles had a median sample size of 20. A total of 17 articles discussed themes related to the engagement in court, 21 articles discussed workforce support, and 122 articles discussed staff competencies and characteristics (the total does not equal 138 as some articles covered more than one category).

Figure 1. Article inclusion process



RESULTS

The results are divided into three main categories: staff competencies and characteristics, youth engagement in court, and workforce support.

STAFF COMPETENCIES AND CHARACTERISTICS

A total of 122 articles outlined staff competencies and characteristics that were found to support youth workers' engagement with youth in service planning and/or youth engagement activities. We define competencies as the skills and knowledge that child welfare professionals should have to be effective in this work, and characteristics as the helpful internal traits that workers may bring to the work in varying capacities. This review yielded seven competencies (partnering with youth; communication and listening skills; building trusting relationships; preparing and informing youth; advocating for youth; and knowledge about adolescent development) and three characteristics of successful youth engagement workers (committed; flexible; and self-aware). The themes are described below, in order of frequency (number of times they were mentioned in articles). See Table 2 for more information.

Competencies

Partnering with youth.

The most frequently mentioned worker competency (n=85) referred to workers' ability to form an equal, respectful partnership with youth, in which youth have a voice and staff and youth make decisions as a team. Mitra et al. (2013) define youth-adult partnerships as "relationships in which both youth and adults have the potential to contribute to decision-making processes, to learn from one another, and to promote change." In a partnership, youth and staff share responsibility for success (Green & Ellis, 2008). Youth-adult partnerships require adults and youth to set clear expectations for one another and to clarify one another's roles and responsibilities (Dixon et al., 2019). True partnership requires child welfare professionals and youth to recognize power imbalances inherent in their working relationship so that they may resolve or work around those imbalances over the course of the partnership (Havlicek, 2016). Parties need to continually check in with each other to see how the partnership is going and what adjustments need to be made for youth and adults to work as a successful team (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, 2009).

Communication and listening skills.

Communication and active listening skills were mentioned in 73 articles. Effective youth engagement child welfare professionals have open, honest, and respectful communication with youth, and continually provide up-to-date information pertinent to the youth to aid them in making decisions. Successful child welfare professionals make active efforts to elicit youth preferences and hear what youth are

saying. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2019) recommends assessing how adults are *"asking for, listening to, and incorporating the ideas of young people"* (pg. 3). Staff need to create opportunities for youth to share their views openly (Ahn, 2018). Instead of asking youth how they feel in an open-ended way, it can be helpful to provide more specific prompts to help youth scaffold their thoughts (Simmons et al., 2017). It is important for staff not to silence youth voices that contradict the opinions or views of staff by sharing their own contradicting opinion too quickly, as this can cause youth to feel powerless and may lead to youth not opening up again in the future (Dietz et al., 1991; Ranahan, 2019; Richards-Schuster et al., 2021). Richardson & Yates (2018) found that both child welfare professionals and youth were highly attuned to authentic communication, stating: *"Even though workers may try to soften or mask negative messages in content with neutral or positive tone, foster youth do pick up on (and perhaps focus on) the negative content that workers are communicating."* In addition to honest communication, youth feel more engaged when child welfare professionals use everyday language and humor to connect (Ausberger, 2014).

Building trusting relationships.

Child welfare professional's ability to build trusting relationships with youth was mentioned in 60 articles. Agencies need to hire workers who are motivated to form deep, stable relationships with youth that are enduring and supportive (Samuels, 2008). Relationship building takes time and requires the child welfare professional to meet the youth where they are at by assessing the youth's readiness to move forward. Building a therapeutic alliance requires creating a sense of safety and trust between the child welfare professionals and the youth

(Boel-Studt et al., 2018). Relationship building can be aided by child welfare professionals exhibiting openness, warmth, and acceptance for the youth (Pedersen et al., 2016), which provides youth with a sense of safety (Grace, 2018). A key element of building a trusting relationship is setting professional boundaries from the outset of the relationship so that youth know what they should and should not expect from their worker (Bryson, 2003). At the same time, child welfare professionals should remain authentic in their approach to relationship building - Ball et al. (2021) outlines ways that child welfare professionals can move away from transactional interactions with youth and towards transformational relationships. Once youth feel they can trust their worker, they can begin to have more open explorations of their hopes, dreams, and fears related to permanency (Jacobs & Freundlich, 2006).

Strength based approach.

Thirty-seven articles referred to the need for child welfare professionals to use a strength-based rather than deficit-based approach to working with youth, focusing on the unique strengths and abilities youth bring to the table. Staff must learn to see youth as the experts on their own lives and make efforts to build their confidence by recognizing their positive qualities and achievements (Body & Hogg, 2019; Feldman & Silverman, 2014; Havlicek, 2016; Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 2019; Martinez et al., 2018). Youth may also be encouraged to define their own role in participation according to their strengths and abilities (Kothari, 1996; Suleiman, 2006; Thorp, 1986). Youth are more likely to feel comfortable participating in meetings when child welfare professionals speak positively about them (Hall et al., 2015).

Prepare and inform youth.

Thirty-six articles referenced staff preparing youth to engage in planning efforts. This may include helping youth understand what to expect from the planning process (Mitra, 2005; Samuels, 2008; Simmons et al., 2020); clarifying roles and responsibilities (Dixon et al., 2019); preparing youth to participate in planning efforts through practice, coaching, and/or skill building (Burford & Gallagher, 2015); and providing youth with relevant information about their case and their permanency options so they can make informed decisions (Graham & Bruce, 2006; Freundlich et al., 2006; Fostering Youth Change, 2019).

Advocate for youth.

Thirty-three articles referenced the need for child welfare professionals to be advocates for youth. Park et al. (2020) found that youth who perceive their workers to be helpful were more likely to engage in planning efforts. Child welfare professionals act as youth allies, which includes advocating for youth desires, connecting them with resources, and addressing any obstacles as they arise (Checkoway et al., 2003; Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2003; Pancer et al., 2003).

Knowledge about adolescent development.

Eighteen articles included content related to knowledge about adolescent development. Staff understand adolescent development and possess the ability to validate and support people in this life stage. Ball et al. (2021) described knowledge of adolescent development as a core competency in most youth engagement programs. In getting to know youth, staff have the responsibility to understand how trauma may impact adolescent brain development, and how the youth's

developmental stage may impact their approach to working together (Salazar et al., 2021). By understanding adolescent development, organizations can plan and implement programs that meet the youth's development needs, particularly in regard to program design, language choice, and interpersonal connections with youth (Walker & Arbreton, 2005; Schine et al., 1981; Child Information Gateway, 2016; Ball et al., 2021, Juvenile Law Center, 2009; Aggelton & Campbell, 2000; Bryson, 2003; Buss, 2015; Mohamed et al., 2001; Akiva & Petrokubi, 2016; Salazar, Spiers, & Pfister, 2020; Burford & Gallagher, 2015; Augsberger, 2014; Charles & Nelson, 2000; Green & Ellis, 2008). Youth engagement programs can also provide developmental benefits for youth (Head, 2011; Collins, Augsberger, & Gecker, 2018).

Characteristics

Committed.

Thirty-six articles discussed the need for child welfare professionals to be committed to youth engagement and motivated to implement youth engagement approaches. Child welfare professionals need to be personally motivated to engage youth (Fylkesnes et al., 2018), and it is also helpful for agencies to provide organizational support for youth engagement work and to communicate those values to staff (Vis & Fossum, 2015). To get worker buy-in, training efforts should be focused on communicating the value and purpose of engaging youth (Walker et al., 2018). Child welfare professionals must also remain hopeful and committed to helping all youth achieve permanency, even when youth have traits or behaviors that cause workers to perceive them as "hard to place," such as older age or behavioral problems (Jacobs & Freundlich, 2006).

Flexibility.

Thirty-two articles discussed the need for child welfare professionals to be flexible and adaptive when engaging youth. This requires workers to know when to "step up" and "step back." Organizations that are open to creative and individualized problem solving – as opposed to agencies that are more bureaucratic – open the door for child welfare professionals to be more flexible in their approach to youth work. An example of worker flexibility is getting feedback from youth and shifting their approach and role according to each youth's unique needs, style, and stage in the planning process (Green & Ellis, 2008; Richards-Schuster, 2017; Kirshner, 2008). Staff can offer youth a range of ways to participate in the planning process rather than mandating a one-size-fits-all approach (Simmons et al., 2020).

Self-awareness.

Self-awareness was mentioned in 27 articles. Child welfare professionals need to have awareness of their own personal style, values and idiosyncrasies and be able to maintain clear boundaries between work and personal life. Self-aware professionals are open to working with youth with different life experiences than their own. A successful child welfare professional demonstrates humility in working with youth and is willing to accept that they may not know what is best or be the expert in every situation (Cairns, 2001). Dietz et al. (1991) explain that a key first step of training is supporting workers' exploration of their own personal beliefs and hang-ups related to youth engagement and partnering with youth. Walker et al. (2018) offer a tool (Youth/Young Adult Voice at the Agency Level, or Y-VAL) for child welfare professionals to self-assess the degree to which they are including youth voice in practice.

The above competencies and characteristics aid workers in helping youth plan for permanency. By partnering with youth, communicating with them about their goals, and being flexible, workers elicit more individualized permanency goals for youth.

Table 2. Caseworker competencies and characteristics related to youth engagement (N=122).

Competency	# of articles	% of N	Description
Partnering with youth	85	70%	Child welfare professionals actively seek the perspectives and desires of youth and make decisions as a team. Each party can make suggestions and decisions and the contribution of each is recognized and valued. Adults work in full partnership with young people on issues facing youth and/or on programs and policies affecting youth.
Communication and listening skills	73	60%	Child welfare professionals have open, honest, and transparent communication with youth, and make active efforts to listen to and hear youth. Actively seek youth voice & perspective. Provide up to date information pertinent to youth.
Building trusting relationships	60	49%	Child welfare professionals build trusting, authentic relationships with youth as a first step to working together. This takes time & requires assessing youth's readiness to move forward. Build therapeutic alliance.
Strength based approach	37	30%	Child welfare professionals use a strength-based vs. deficit-based approach, focusing on the unique strengths and abilities youth bring to the table which can aid in problem solving. Staff use positive language to describe youth.

Prepare and inform youth	36	30%	Child welfare professionals provide youth with information to support informed decision making and prepare youth to engage in planning.
Advocate for youth	33	27%	Child welfare professionals act as an advocate for the youth, making their desires a reality, and connecting youth to resources in the community.
Adolescent development	18	15%	Child welfare professionals understand adolescent development and can validate and support people in this life stage. Professionals understand how trauma can impact adolescent brain development.
Committed	36	30%	Child welfare professionals and organizations are committed to youth engagement and are motivated to implement youth engagement principles. Staff are bought in to the importance and purpose of youth involvement.
Flexibility	32	26%	Child welfare professionals are flexible and adaptive rather than following rigid rules or having set expectations for how things must go. Willing to improvise, get feedback from youth and shift their approach. Outside of the box thinking.
Self-awareness	27	22%	Child welfare professionals have personal awareness of their own values, style and idiosyncrasies and can maintain clear boundaries between work and personal life. Able to reflect on how the partnership is going.

COURT

A total of 17 articles discussed themes related to engaging youth in court. This category includes six primary themes, listed below in order

of salience: preparing youth for court, open communication with youth, active listening/asking questions, accommodate youth attendance at court, extra time/extra meetings, and encourage youth's participation in court. See Table 3 for more information.

Preparing youth for court.

Eleven articles reference the theme of preparing youth for court. This theme is defined as court staff ensuring youth understand what will happen in court, helping youth comprehend court terminology, discussing with youth when and how they should speak, and practicing what they want to say and what questions they will likely be asked by the judge. Furthermore, youth should be provided with relevant information to help them make informed decisions. Preparing for court could take the form of understanding the court process (Jenkins, 2008; Puritz & Katayoon, 2007; Miller et al., 2012), providing information about the physical space and layout of the court room (Ausberger, Lens, & Hughes, 2016), ensuring they understand their role in relation to the other stakeholders in the court room (Birnbaum & Saini, 2012) and describing appropriate courtroom behavior (Jenkins, 2008). All these types of preparation enable the youth to fully engage in the court process in an empowered and informed manner.

Open communication.

A total of 11 articles included content related to the theme of open, prompt, and clear communication and information sharing with youth about the details of their case and what is happening. Those who work with youth in the legal field take time to talk to youth while avoiding legalese as much as possible (Jenkins, 2008) and provide youth with timely updates on their cases (Miller, 2012). Communication skills

were described in two articles as the most important skills an attorney should have when working with youth (Ball et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2012).

Active listening.

Nine articles discussed active listening in court. This theme encompasses the importance of asking youth direct questions about their experiences and preferences, listening to what the youth say, and giving weight to their preferences when making decisions. Judges, attorneys, and others working in the legal sector should take the time to ask the youth questions regarding their perspective and experience (Ausberger, Lens, & Hughes, 2016). Attorneys should also take the time to ensure that they understand the client's perspective and to provide suggestions for legal ways to help the client reach their goals (Starr, Yohalem, & Gannett, 2009).

Accommodate youth attendance at court.

Nine articles referenced accommodating youth attendance at court. This theme includes ensuring that court hearings are not scheduled during times the youth is unavailable due to extracurriculars and school. The theme also includes the importance of informing the youth of their court date, supporting their attendance, and making sure the court environment is more welcoming for youth. Several articles noted that scheduling factors such as planning court hearings at inaccessible times for youth prevented the youth from being able to fully engage in the process (Ausberger, Lens, & Hughes, 2016; Burford & Gallagher, 2015; Bridge, 2021; Freundlich et al., 2006). In fact, Starr, Yohalem, and Gannet note that *"scheduling that conflicts with a client's events — such as school, athletic activities, musical recitals, and peer*

activities — should be treated with the same caution as conflicts with the court's own calendar" (2009, pg. 16).

Extra time.

A total of five articles referenced the need for extra time and/or extra meetings to fully engage youth. Courts and attorneys may choose to allot extra time when children are present in case the youth needs time to ask or answer questions or needs a private interview with the judge. Given that many of the court proceedings may be new to youth, attorneys should plan extra time to equip youth with the knowledge they may need during the process (Birnbaum & Saini, 2012; Miller et al., 2019). It is also important for judges to plan for extra time for youth interviews (Bridge, 2010). One study found that the length of conversation between the youth and the judge positively correlated with the youth's desire to prioritize court attendance (Weisz et al., 2011).

Encourage children's participation.

Four articles discussed encouraging children's participation in court, meaning that adults encourage youth to participate in court and validate their participation through verbal affirmations. Many youth see the courtroom as too intimidating a place for them to voice their opinions (Buss, 2015). However, another article found that when children were encouraged by the judge to participate, they felt less upset and found it easier to talk to the judge in front of others (Weisz et al., 2011).

Table 3. Youth engagement in court (N=17)

Theme	Number of articles	% of N	Description
Preparing youth for court	11	65%	Ensuring youth understand what will happen in court, help youth understand terminology, when and how they should speak, practice what they want to say and what they will likely be asked about. Provide relevant information to help them make informed decisions. Provide options.
Open communication	11	65%	Clear, prompt, open communication and information sharing with youth about the details of their case and what is happening.
Active listening	9	53%	Ask children direct questions about their experiences and preferences. Listen to what youth say and give weight to their preferences when making decisions.
Accommodate youth attendance at court	9	53%	Ensuring that court hearings are not scheduled during times the youth is unavailable due to extracurriculars, school, etc. Inform youth of their court date and support their attendance. Make the court environment more welcoming for youth.
Extra time	5	29%	Courts allot extra time when children are present in case the youth needs time to ask or answer questions or needs a private interview with the judge. Attorneys allot extra time to meet with youth before each hearing.
Encourage children's participation in court	4	24%	Encourage children to participate in court and validate their participation. Provide verbal affirmations.

WORKFORCE SUPPORT

The workforce support category included 21 articles, which yielded five unique themes: coaching, support, peer support/teamwork, youth involvement in training, and supervisor observation. These themes are described below. See Table 4 for more information.

Coaching.

Fifteen articles included themes related to coaching, which we define as providing ongoing support for practitioners' learning to implement a youth engagement approach. Coaching may include reflective listening, education, field observation, and/or other supportive methods to help staff implement an intervention with fidelity. Coaching enables staff to identify and address their own personal areas in need of improvement regarding youth engagement work (Jacobs & Freundlich, 2006; Cody & D'Arcy, 2019; Teizeira, 2021), and can improve the efficacy of the youth engagement intervention overall (Atlantic Coast Child Welfare Implementation Center, 2013; Walker, Seibel, & Jackson, 2017; Murray et al., 2018). To support staff honesty and vulnerability regarding their shortcomings and challenges implementing an intervention, coaching should be voluntary and confidential (Das, Connelly, & Johnson, 2021). Coaching can occur between youth and adults (with either assuming the coaching role) (Dietz et al., 1991; Cahill & Dadvand, 2018) and between staff and trusted colleagues (Libby, Sedonaen, & Bliss, 2006). Coaching should be positive and growth-oriented (Libby, Rosen, & Sedonean, 2005).

Supervision.

A total of 10 articles referenced the supervision theme. Supervision includes case consultation, feedback on employee performance, and

communication regarding the importance of implementing a youth engagement approach. Given that youth engagement work can be time-consuming and may take staff member's time away from traditionally valued activities (through prioritizing relationships over efficiency), it is important to have strong administrative support for this value, which can be emphasized in supervision (Jacobs & Freundlich, 2006; Schine et al., 1981). Supervision can take place through individual or group sessions and provides a valuable method for ensuring that staff are working towards and aligned on the organizational value of youth engagement (Holloway, 1982; Van Veelen et al., 2017a. Van Veelen et al., 2017b; Lietz et al., 2018; Children's Bureau, 2019).

Peer support.

Workforce peer support was mentioned in 8 articles. We define peer support as a shift away from individual responsibility to shared/team responsibility, where employees are given dedicated time and space to learn with and consult their peers who are implementing the same intervention. Ongoing communication between team members about youth engagement strategies that are or are not working well can promote an environment of growth and mutual support among staff (Malvaso et al., 2016).

Youth involvement in worker training.

Six articles referenced the theme of youth involvement in training. This theme encompasses the idea that training and coaching staff on youth engagement can be enhanced with youth involvement. Including young people in developing and delivering staff training enables staff to learn about youth's experiences (Walker, Seibel, & Jackson, 2018; Libby, Rosen, & Sedonaen, 2005; Cody & D'Arcy, 2005; Libby,

Sedonaen, & Bliss, 2006) as well as effective methods for connecting with youth (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018). Involving youth in coaching can also allow staff to gain feedback and hear directly from youth on what does and does not work for them in the program (Dietz et al., 1991).

Supervisor observation.

The final theme within the workforce support category is supervisor observation. Three articles discussed supervisor observation, which refers to supervisors or coaches observing staff as they implement a youth engagement approach and provide feedback. Two studies found that recording videos of employees' interactions with youth helped both the supervisor and the employee provide feedback on areas that need improvement (Murray et al., 2018; Walker, Seibel, & Jackson, 2017). Supervisor observations often provided concrete examples for employees and supervisors regarding their areas of strength and weakness in youth engagement work (Murray et al., 2018; Walker, Seibel, & Jackson, 2017; Dietz et al., 1991).

Table 4. Workforce support (N=21)

Theme	# of articles	% of N	Description
Coaching	15	71%	Coaches provide ongoing support for practitioners learning to implement a youth engagement approach. This may include reflective listening, education, field observation, and/or other supportive methods to help staff implement an intervention with fidelity. Coaching should not be mandatory nor tied to the employee's performance.
Supervision	10	48%	Supervisors provide case consultation, feedback on employee performance, and communicate the importance of implementing a youth engagement approach.
Peer support, teamwork	8	38%	Peers can play a key role in supporting one another's learning. It is helpful to shift away from individual responsibility to one of shared/team responsibility, where employees are given dedicated time and space to learn with and consult their peers who are implementing the same intervention.
Youth involvement in training	6	29%	Training and coaching staff on youth engagement can be enhanced with youth involvement. Youth can provide their insights when designing trainings and workshops for adults. Youth can speak about their experience at educational events.

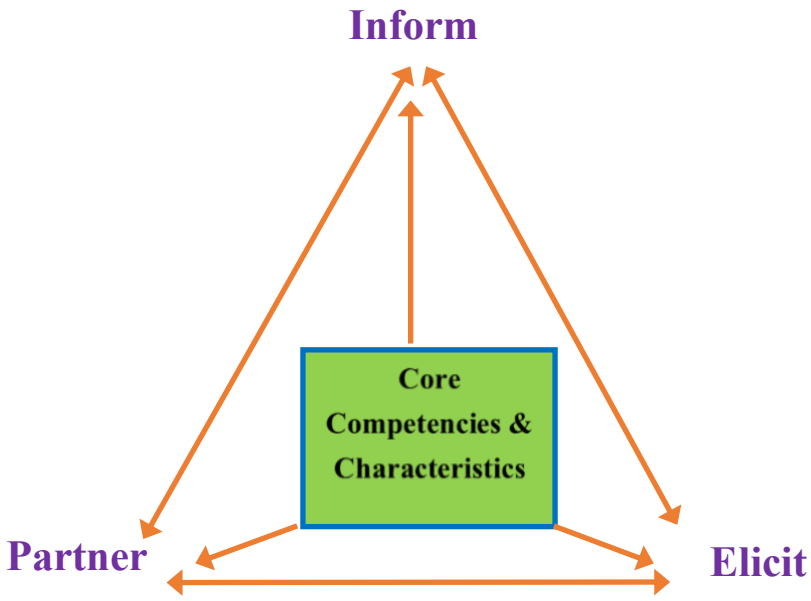
Supervisor observation	3	14%	Supervisors or coaches observe staff implementing a youth engagement approach and provide feedback about ways they are doing well and ways to improve delivery of the intervention.

DISCUSSION

INFORM, ELICIT, AND PARTNER

Staff who wish to engage youth in the permanency planning process must learn to work with youth as equal partners rather than service recipients. This was evident in the competencies and characteristics, workforce, and court themes that arose in the literature review. We believe the themes can be summarized into three primary responsibilities of youth engagement workers: informing, eliciting, and partnering. Each of the competencies and characteristics described throughout this paper supports implementation of one or more of these actions. All three responsibilities may be utilized concurrently throughout the course of the partnership depending on what is needed in the moment to plan for the youth's permanency.

Figure 2. Core responsibilities of youth engagement workers



1. ***Inform:*** Youth cannot tell child welfare professionals what they want unless they understand what is happening and why. Staff set the stage by explaining the purpose of the permanency planning process and detailing how the youth and worker will form a collaborative partnership with clearly defined roles. The child welfare professional explains the youth's permanency options and the consequences and implications of each option, ensuring the youth has full understanding of the process.

2. ***Elicit:*** Child welfare professionals should elicit youth perspective and preferences, providing scaffolding as needed to help youth consider what and who is important to them. For youth to feel safe opening up and exploring their options, it is crucial that workers take the time to build authentic, trusting relationships with youth.

The process is centered on the youth in that moment. Child welfare professionals should be careful not to push youth to make quick decisions or provide preferences without first building a solid relationship that allows open and honest conversations. Child welfare professionals should only move as fast as the relationship.

3. ***Partner:*** This is the action stage, in which youth and child welfare professionals partner with one another to make shared decisions about the plan. This requires assessing and addressing power imbalances inherent in the youth-worker relationship and having accountability mechanisms in place to ensure that decision making is shared in an equitable way. Child welfare professionals must act as allies and advocates for youth when coordinating with other stakeholders involved in the youth's plan.

COMPETENCIES AND INFORM, ELICIT AND PARTNER

The seven identified worker competencies directly impact workers' success when implementing the three main responsibilities (Inform, Elicit, and Partner). 'Partnering with youth' requires a change in the mindset and perspectives of child welfare professionals to emphasize the importance of youth engagement and the action of actively seeking out the perspectives and desires of the youth in order to make collaborative decisions. Being competent in 'partnering with youth' provides the foundation for true engagement throughout, but especially in the Partnering responsibility.

Much like 'partnering with youth', 'prepare and inform youth' requires a strategy on how to prepare youth to engage in planning. This includes clearly defining roles and expectations. Additionally, child

welfare professionals may be required to build the skills of the youth, so they are prepared to participate fully in the planning process.

It is not enough just to place value and recognize the importance of youth engagement. Child welfare professionals also need to be competent in 'building trusting relationships' with the youth they serve. One of the ways to ensure a therapeutic alliance occurs is agreeing upon the goals (which will occur with a combination of informing and eliciting), agreement on the roles of the youth and the worker, and the development of a bond between the worker and the youth that promotes a safe environment, trust, and collaborative care.

One of the ways to 'build trusting relationships' is to demonstrate good 'communication and listening skills.' The worker's ability to be open, honest, and transparent with the youth assists with building trust. To be a true ally with you, a child welfare professional is required to not only listen to a youth's needs and desires, but to actively seek out the youth's voice to understand the youth as a whole. While informing, the worker will rely on their ability to clearly communicate information as well as their ability to elicit responses from the youth to be sure successful communication occurred. This back and forth provides a more even field and promotes partnership.

Utilizing a 'strength-based approach' allows the child welfare professional to focus on the skills and abilities the youth brings to the table and how those strengths can be used to support their decisions and goals moving forward. This includes the language that child welfare professionals use to speak to and about the youth. When fully adopting a 'strength-based approach', the worker views the youth as the expert on their own life and see the youth as one who is capable of making informed decisions.

The child welfare professional must have 'knowledge of adolescent development' in order to implement developmentally appropriate approaches to youth engagement in permanency planning. Understanding the youth's development and experiences informs how the program is designed, the language used, and interpersonal connections with youth. It is critical the worker understands that chronological age is not always the best measure of a youth's developmental stage. However, basic knowledge of adolescent development and the impact of trauma enables the child welfare professional to understand, validate and support the youth.

Lastly, a worker that is competent as an 'advocate for youth' is focused on the desires expressed by the youth and works to connect the youth with needed resources, services, and networking needed to accomplish the youth's goals. An advocate assists the youth in overcoming barriers to their goals and ultimately helps them build a comprehensive permanency plan.

CHARACTERISTICS AND INFORM, ELICIT, AND PARTNER

The identified characteristics (commitment; flexibility; and self-awareness) assist in implementing the Inform, Elicit, and Partner responsibilities. For example, to properly inform youth about the purpose of participation, the child welfare professionals themselves must understand the purpose of youth engagement and be bought in to partnering with youth. The worker's commitment to youth engagement is demonstrated by their motivation to understand the system and permanency process fully. This characteristic provides a good foundation for authentic relationship building.

Working with youth requires flexibility and adaptability in all three responsibilities of child welfare professionals. For example, when providing information to a youth, the approach a worker takes with one youth may differ from the next based on the youth's experience, situation, and abilities. Being flexible allows the worker to adapt and change their approach as needed based on the needs of the youth. Additionally, flexible child welfare professionals are more responsive to the needs of the youth in the moment. For example, when eliciting information, if the worker notices the youth withdrawing, child welfare professionals can adapt and change direction in order to move at the pace that is most beneficial to the youth and reflected by the stage of the child welfare professional/youth relationship.

The worker must also be aware of their own feelings and opinions regarding the permanency planning process and the idea of partnering with youth. Child welfare professionals must be self-aware in order to understand their own assumptions about youth involvement in permanency planning. Being self-aware will allow the worker to avoid projecting their own feelings onto the youth while providing information. This is critical as the worker will want to move to the 'Elicit' phase to gather information from the youth and if there is projection, the youth may not feel safe contradicting the worker and therefore abstain from providing their perspective or preferences when asked.

VOICES OF THE QIC-EY WORKFORCE COUNCIL

The QIC-EY Workforce Council, comprised of child welfare trainers as well as workforce development, youth engagement, and curriculum design experts, provided feedback on the practical application of the

themes identified in the first round of the literature review. Their feedback is summarized below.

Demonstration of empathy & authenticity.

Members of the Workforce Council indicated that empathy is a common characteristic that child welfare staff need to demonstrate. Empathy can be defined as the ability to understand someone else's experience and to feel care and warmth for other people. The council also stated that that the characteristic of authenticity was missing from the review, which is defined as the ability to show up as one's whole self and relate to youth in an honest, compassionate, and genuine manner.

While the research team did not specifically create a code for empathy and authentic engagement, other characteristics and competencies listed in the review do encompass these qualities. In particular, empathy is crucial for effectively partnering with youth, communicating and listening to them, and building trusting relationships. The workforce council's suggestion regarding the importance of emphasizing empathy as a unique skill, indicates that empathy is a vital component of youth engagement work.

VOICES OF THE QIC-EY NATIONAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

The QIC-EY National Youth Engagement Advisory Council is made up of professionals and experts with recent lived experience in the child welfare system. The council provided feedback on how the themes in the literature review compared with their own professional and personal experiences.

Council members primarily emphasized the importance of finding ways to be aware of and shift the power dynamics inherent in the legal system. While the literature review touched on aspects of how child welfare professionals could share power with youth through the "partnering with youth" competency, this theme did not come up to the same degree in the court articles, despite its importance. "Empathy" is another crucial characteristic for child welfare professionals to be able to understand the importance of balancing power dynamics and ensuring youth feel comfortable, informed, and empowered throughout the legal process.

One council member explained that in their experience, court professionals lacked awareness of what it feels like to have your entire life examined and criticized. In order to engage youth in the court process, this dynamic must shift. The council member recommended several ways to create this shift, including "coming off the court stand" and literally getting on the same level as families. The council member recommended integrating staff with lived expertise into the court process to provide an alternative perspective and voice for young people and families. However, the council member acknowledged that the person in this role would still hold power over families and youth because they are a staff member. Alternatively, courts could partner with organizations that have already embedded lived expertise into their court processes.

The "encourage youth participation in court" theme included the importance of creating a child-friendly court environment. However, only a handful of articles discussed this. Council members explained the need to create a comfortable space for young people as a prerequisite to engagement in court. Court can be a very oppressive and disempowering environment for young people involved in the child

welfare system. There are many spoken and unspoken expectations about how those attending court should behave, including business dress and overly formal communication. The judge is stationed physically above those being heard, and the environment is designed to be austere and intimidating for adults and children alike. It is important to evaluate the physical space in which engagement between children and professionals is intended to take place. This may include considerations of what would make children of varying ages feel more comfortable in the courtroom, such as more pictures, color, couches, age-appropriate language, a smaller room, etc.

SUMMARY

Researchers identified a total of 138 articles that related to the key competencies and characteristics of youth engagement workers. During the review process, seven competencies, three characteristics, six court, and five workforce support themes were identified. Additionally, two characteristics were identified by the Workforce Council. These themes are summarized below.

Competencies and Characteristics.

Essential competencies of youth engagement workers include partnering with youth; communication and listening skills; building trusting relationships; strength-based approach; preparing and informing youth; advocating for youth; and knowledge about adolescent development. Core characteristics of youth engagement workers include commitment; flexibility; and self-awareness. The Workforce and Youth Engagement Advisory Councils also agreed that empathy and authenticity are important characteristics that youth engagement workers should possess.

Workforce Support.

Agencies can support workers to embrace youth engagement principles by offering training workshops in partnership with youth,

mentoring and coaching staff as they implement the new intervention, embedding youth engagement principles throughout the organization, providing opportunities for workers to connect with their peers to learn and consult on cases, and through observing workers in action.

Court.

Court staff should work to schedule court dates around youth availability, provide needed supports to ensure youth can attend their court date, and make the courtroom more welcoming for children. Attorneys should adequately prepare youth for court and provide timely updates on their case in an age-appropriate manner so that youth can participate to their fullest ability. Judges have a large role to play in encouraging children to participate, asking them questions, and taking their preferences into account when making decisions.

The research team derived three main responsibilities of youth engagement workers from these themes. The three responsibilities are Inform, Elicit, and Partner. Youth engagement workers use all the competencies and characteristics defined above to ensure the youth is fully informed of the process, the structure of the partnership, and expectations of the youth-worker relationship. Additionally, the worker centers the youth's voice as an expert in their experience and elicits feedback on the youth's desired outcomes. Throughout the engagement process, workers partner with youth to advocate for their desired plan and becomes a true ally and partner.

References available upon request.

This report is supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling $4 million dollars with 100 percent funded by ACF/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit the ACF websites, Administrative and National Policy Requirements | The Administration for Children and Families (hhs.gov).