



QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER
ON ENGAGING YOUTH IN
FINDING PERMANENCY

Program Implementation Primer

**Nebraska: Permanency Planning
and Court Orientation Program**

Program Implementation Primer

Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program

The Quality Improvement Center on Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency (QIC-EY) Program Implementation Primer introduces the *Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program* and serves as a comprehensive guide for child welfare agencies considering its implementation. Designed for agencies ready to make a meaningful impact, this guide goes beyond a simple overview. It shares the insights and tools needed to assess interest, to ensure infrastructure readiness and to navigate implementation with confidence. It includes the following:

- **Logic Model:** a framework that illustrates how program resources and activities lead to intended outcomes
- **Core Components:** the essential functions and practices that need to be delivered consistently and with fidelity to ensure effectiveness
- **Program Delivery:** the amount and intensity of participant engagement necessary for achieving program success
- **Implementation Supports:** foundational resources that enable high-quality delivery (such as staffing, training, policies, supervision, partnerships and data systems)
- **Evaluation:** systematic measurement of fidelity in program delivery and of outcomes, performed to monitor progress and to demonstrate program impact
- **Implementation Lessons Learned and Tips:** common barriers to implementation and practical strategies for overcoming them
- **Additional Program Materials:** practical aids — program manuals, logic models, fidelity checklists, scripts and other resources — that support consistent and effective delivery

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1. Program Overview

Youth engagement in permanency planning is a critical factor in achieving meaningful and lasting permanency outcomes. When youth engage in these discussions, they gain decision-making skills, develop a sense of agency and become more likely to share information about their relationships and preferences that can support achieving permanency (Augsberger, 2014). Despite the benefits of youth engagement, research indicates that youth are not always meaningfully included in case planning and court-related processes and may have limited understanding of decisions that affect them (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2026; Toros et al., 2018; van Bijleveld, et al., 2014).

The *Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program* addresses these challenges by equipping youth with the knowledge, skills and support needed to participate meaningfully in their own permanency planning and legal processes. This voluntary program provides a structured way for youth to

- gain a clear understanding of permanency planning and court procedures,
- explore and express their wishes for their permanency outcomes, and
- develop strategies for sharing their voices in court and planning settings.

The program incorporates youth-driven, action planning through collaboration of youth with their caseworkers or other designated support persons. It draws ideas from the Monroe County Family Court (New York) orientation program for youth in court. It is informed further by the QIC-EY initiative and aligned with the *Transforming Engagement: Keeping Children and Youth at the Center of Our Work* (QIC-EY, 2025) training for child welfare professionals. This multifaceted approach provides youth, caseworkers and others who support youth with a shared foundation for authentic engagement throughout the permanency planning process.



“My girls talked with me about placement options for the future on the drive back from orientation. Those conversations were necessary and productive.”

- caseworker

2. Program Goals

Youth who understand the permanency planning and court processes are more likely to share their perspectives, to participate meaningfully in these processes that will affect their futures and to identify their supportive connections—all of which increase their likelihood of achieving lasting legal and relational permanency (Farmer, 2008; Friend, 2009; Welti et al., 2021). By providing youth with structured preparation, orientation and follow-up, the *Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program* supports stronger engagement and better permanency outcomes.

THIS PROGRAM AIMS TO:

- equip youth with the knowledge and confidence to participate in permanency planning and court processes;
 - strengthen relationships between each youth and the youth's caseworker or other designated support person through intentional preparation and follow-up;
 - promote youth-driven decision-making by elevating youth voice and preferences in planning and court settings;
 - create consistent structures within child welfare practice that support authentic engagement of youth; and
 - increase youth collaboration with caseworkers and court personnel to improve permanency outcomes.
- an improved understanding of court staff roles and procedures, improving the likelihood of developing positive relationships with court staff members;
 - improved relationships with caseworkers and other designated support persons;
 - increased participation in court hearings in person or via alternative methods (e.g., writing a letter); and
 - improved alignment of each youth's permanency plan with the youth's desires, preferences and identified sources of support and strength.

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

As a result of participating in the program, youth will have:

- a better understanding of the permanency planning and court processes;
- a sense of empowerment and increased confidence in their roles within both processes and ideas for how to participate in these processes;

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

The program also aims to contribute over time to increases in each of the following:

- rates of legal permanency
- presence and quality of relational and cultural permanency
- implementation of policies and procedures that reflect child welfare systems' commitment to youth engagement
- stable permanence

3. Logic Model

A logic model illustrates how to achieve expected outputs and outcomes of a program through implementation of its core components and activities. A logic model needs to explain clearly how specific activities and services are expected to produce or to influence their associated short- and long-term outcomes.

Agency resources, goals and other factors will impact the logic model. The Additional Program Materials section of this primer includes an example of a logic model, which can be modified to fit a particular agency's specific approach to implementation.



4. Core Components

Core components are critical to the identity and the aim of each program. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (Education Development Center, 2018), “Core components are the most essential and indispensable components of an intervention practice or program.” The core components of the *Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program* include the following:

Structured, Relationship-Centered Support

This component ensures that each young person has a designated support person —such as a caseworker, an advocate or other trusted provider—who provides consistent, relationship-based guidance throughout all stages of the program. Through intentional, recurring contacts, the support person builds trust, helps the young person prepare for what to expect and offers emotional and informational scaffolding. This relationship serves as the primary mechanism for strengthening engagement, continuity and safety to enable the young person to process experiences, to ask questions and to make informed decisions. Without this structured, supportive relationship, the youth is less likely to experience psychological safety, to remain engaged and to participate meaningfully in permanency processes, limiting the program’s impact.

Court Orientation Experience

This structured, learning experience in a courthouse equips young people with the knowledge and familiarity they need to engage confidently and meaningfully in legal processes. Activities such as a courthouse tour, a mock hearing and a guided question-and-answer session demystify the legal system, increase understanding of court roles and terminology, and reduce fear and confusion.

This orientation serves as an essential, experiential anchor. It shifts young people’s perceptions of court from an overwhelming, opaque system to an accessible environment where youth can see how their voices matter. Without this experience, courts can seem intimidating and confusing, undermining the program’s aim of enabling youth to participate in decisions that directly affect their lives.

Youth-Driven Permanency and Participation Planning

This component enables young people to exercise agency by identifying their goals, preferred supports and how they want to participate in their legal and permanency processes. Using guided conversations and tools for planning, each youth’s support person helps the youth to articulate wishes and to understand options, ensuring that these preferences are reflected in the permanency plan. Through this process, each youth moves from passive involvement to active participation. The planning process connects new knowledge with concrete actions and decision-making. Without it, learning remains conceptual rather than actionable, leaving youth voice more likely to be overlooked during permanency discussions.

Supported Youth Participation and Debriefing

This component ensures that young people are prepared well for their participation in court, supported during their court appearances and guided afterward. Prior to participation, each youth's support person helps the young person to understand what will happen and to practice expressing one's own views. In court, the support person remains available to ensure emotional safety and to offer real-time guidance. Afterward, debriefing allows the youth to process what occurred, to integrate new information and to determine next steps related to the young person's permanency goals. Without this preparation, presence and reflection, youth participation may become confusing, emotionally overwhelming or disconnected from planning, which undermines the aim of affirming youth voice and agency.

Adherence to Structured Stages

Adherence to the five stages of the *Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program* ensures that youth receive consistent, structured preparation and support throughout their permanency planning and court participation experiences. Completing the stages in order is critical because each stage builds on the one before it. The stages are structured to help youth understand expectations, process new information and plan how they want their voices represented. Sequencing protects continuity, reinforces learning and ensures that youth are equipped and supported to participate competently. Summaries of the five stages follow. Additional details about each stage appear in the program manual.

STAGE 1: PRE-ORIENTATION MEETING WITH YOUTH

During a routine contact with a youth, the designated support person introduces the Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program by using program tools and handouts to explain its purpose and upcoming activities. This contact may occur during a monthly home visit with the youth's caseworker or through another support person who has established a relationship with the young person. The youth receives a flyer explaining the program and begins discussions about permanency planning, including how to use one's voice to influence decision-making. Then the youth and the support person make initial plans to continue discussing these topics throughout their future contacts.

STAGE 2: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN COURT ORIENTATION

The youth attends an orientation session in a courthouse. The orientation is structured to include a courthouse tour, observation of a mock hearing and a question-and-answer session with a panel comprising legal professionals, a person with lived experience and a caseworker. The youth receives resource materials, including question prompts, to guide future conversations with the young person's caseworker and legal representatives.



"Being in the courtroom without the formalities made it less intimidating... it wasn't as scary as I thought it was going to be."

- team of lived experience member

STAGE 3: POST-ORIENTATION MEETINGS WITH YOUTH

During the next several contacts, the youth and the designated support person reflect on the court orientation experience. Together they review the youth's case and permanency plans, and the support person responds to questions. These conversations may occur during monthly home visits with the caseworker or another support person. The youth and the support person work jointly to develop a youth-driven plan outlining how to ensure that the young person's voice will be represented during the next court hearing or permanency planning meeting.

STAGE 4: YOUTH VOICE AND PARTICIPATION IN COURT

The youth implements the participation plan. This plan may include attending the court hearing to observe it, speaking directly to the judge or submitting a written statement. The chosen method reflects the youth's comfort level and developmental readiness.

STAGE 5: FOLLOW-UP WITH YOUTH AFTER COURT APPEARANCE

After the court hearing, the youth and the designated support person debrief together. They discuss the outcome of the hearing, express their reflections and address any new questions or concerns. This conversation may occur with the caseworker during a routine visit or with another support person. These individuals work together to reinforce their support for the young person, to review next steps and to provide additional resources for sustaining the youth's engagement in future permanency planning.



5. Program Delivery (Intensity and Duration)

The Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program is designed for delivery over a period of 5 to 6 months. It can be integrated into predetermined touchpoints with youths, such as routine, monthly home visits with caseworkers or comparable, regular contacts with other designated support persons. As each stage builds on the previous one, youth develop understanding and confidence. They participate actively in court and permanency processes. Pacing minimizes the need for scheduling additional meetings between regular contacts while ensuring that each youth has sufficient time to prepare, to participate and to reflect on experiences in the program.

The program consists of five structured stages, delivered primarily through in-person meetings. It includes one group orientation session in a courthouse.

The overall delivery plan includes the following:

- Each youth attends four or five meetings with the young person's caseworker or other designated support person. When this is the caseworker, these conversations typically become part of required, monthly home visits. If another individual fills the supportive role, a monthly meeting schedule needs to be set to ensure consistency.
- One 2-hour, group orientation is held in a courthouse.
- Each youth takes part in a court hearing in the form and at the level of involvement that the young person decides.

Estimated Total Contact Time:

- **Designated Support Person –Youth Meetings:** approximately 4 to 6 hours across the pre-orientation, post-orientation, follow-up and planning sessions
- **Court Orientation Session:** 2 hours
- **Youth Participation in Court:** variable, depending on each youth's chosen method of participation



Program Timeline

STAGE	ACTIVITY	ESTIMATED DURATION	FREQUENCY	TYPICAL TIMING
1	Pre-Orientation Meeting	1 hour	One time	Month 1
2	Court Orientation	2 hours	One time	Month 2
3	Post-Orientation Meetings	1 hour each	At least two visits	Months 3 and 4
4	Youth Participation in Court	Variable	One court hearing	Month 5 (varies by court schedule)
5	Post-Court Follow-Up	1 hour	One time	Month 6

The program framework covers a limited period of time. However, ongoing reinforcement of youth voice and continuing engagement are essential to retain the skills, confidence and habits developed during the structured program. Caseworkers and supervisors play key roles in this. These child welfare professionals need to establish clear expectations from the outset that youth voice will not be a time-limited activity but rather a foundational approach

to permanency planning. Integration of each youth's participation goals into ongoing case planning and permanency discussions needs to continue after the formal program ends. This will reinforce that the program's purpose extends beyond orientation and will help to embed youth engagement as a lasting, normalized practice within the agency's culture.

6. Implementation Supports

Staffing

Effective program delivery requires qualified administrative and program staff who have the skills to support youth engagement, to facilitate orientation activities and to manage logistics. To implement this program effectively, child welfare agencies need to determine the necessary number of staff members, to consider staff-to-youth ratios and to plan for recruitment and retention. They also need to anticipate potential barriers to implementation, such as turnover, limited expertise and competing responsibilities.

Each youth in the *Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program* works with a designated support person who facilitates permanency and case planning activities. The assigned caseworker often fills this role; but an advocate or other trusted provider may serve as the support person, depending on the youth's needs and existing relationships. Caseworkers in this role typically hold entry-level positions and, at a minimum, possess a bachelor's degree in social work, psychology, sociology, counseling, human development, mental health care, education, criminal justice or a closely related field.

Legal professionals who participate in the court orientation serve as volunteers. They are selected by court partners on the planning team. Individuals with lived experience contribute to the orientation by supporting the mock hearing and serving on the discussion panel. Additional support staff with roles in administration and coordination also may be needed to assist with scheduling, communication and logistics to ensure smooth program implementation.

Training and Coaching

Effective implementation of a program requires both training and coaching to ensure program fidelity and optimal quality. Plans for training need to describe the program's curriculum and to detail who will be trained, who will conduct the training, the length of the initial training and any booster sessions, plus certification requirements that may apply. Coaching and supervision provide support for staff members as they apply the model in practice; they also maintain adherence to program standards. Coaching may include individual or group sessions scheduled at regular intervals. These sessions need clearly defined start and end times. Agency leaders need to determine the structure and frequency of coaching sessions to ensure that their staff members receive support consistently while delivering the program as intended.

Specific training and coaching may be needed to make sure that staff members understand the core components of the *Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program* and can deliver each element with fidelity. A program-specific training has been developed for key program staff to review core components, to practice employing implementation strategies and to build confidence for facilitating youth engagement.

Staff members may need additional training to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to support effective engagement. For example, the QIC-EY's *Transforming Engagement: Keeping Children and Youth at the Center of Our Work* (QIC-EY, 2025) training provides practical strategies for achieving authentic engagement

with youth. It equips caseworkers and other staff to support youth participation in permanency planning and decision-making.

Individuals with lived experience need to receive preparation and guidance for their roles in the orientation event as well. This may occur through group sessions or one-on-one meetings facilitated by members of the implementation team.

Supervisors trained in the program model can provide ongoing coaching and support as their staff members navigate each program component. Supervisors also can respond to questions and address challenges that arise during implementation.

Policies and Procedures

Clear policies and procedures are essential to support implementation of a program and to ensure fidelity in its delivery. This includes documentation of any adaptations required to integrate the model into existing agency practices. It also includes identification of potential barriers that could hinder implementation. Establishing formal guidance helps staff members to understand expectations, promotes consistency across the intervention group and supports successful delivery of the selected model.

The program must be supported and integrated within the agency's overall policies and practice expectations. It is important to consider whether policy modifications or additions are needed to administer the program.

Detailed procedural guidance for the program can be found in the Program Manual, located in the Additional Program Materials section of this primer. Some general considerations are noted below.

Some policies and procedures may need to be established or modified to implement the program and to support its ongoing delivery. For example, new policies may be necessary to define the role and the responsibilities of the designated support person. New policies also

may serve to clarify expectations for the content of each program stage and its place in the five-stage sequence. Procedures for preparing, supporting and debriefing youth before and after their participation in court may need revision. Determining which information can be shared with youths regarding their permanency and case plans—and how to share it appropriately -- may pose a barrier to implementation. This is because of frequent misunderstandings and lack of clarity about what should be shared. Clarifying these protocols and providing staff members with clear guidance promote consistency in program delivery and ensure a transparent, comprehensive, information-sharing process.

Fidelity

To ensure implementation of this program as intended, fidelity measurements and protocols are used to assess whether practitioners are delivering the core components of the model. Fidelity tracking needs to include forms to capture key details about each session and meeting, such as start and end times, who delivered the program, the delivery format (in person, virtual, hybrid) and the time spent preparing for and following up after the session.

Checklists or other tools may be needed to document the delivery of core activities and to maintain fidelity across the program's five stages. For example, staff members can use a Court Orientation Checklist to document the delivery and quality of core activities during the event. Designated observers may record whether key components—such as the mock hearing, the courthouse tour and the panel discussion—have occurred as planned. These observers also can note any modifications, challenges and successes.

A Post-Orientation Follow-Up Checklist can be used to verify whether and when the designated support person has met with a youth between the court orientation and the next hearing. The checklist tool helps to track completion of core tasks, including the use of planning worksheets, identification of key team

contacts and descriptions of options for youth participation in upcoming meetings or hearings. It also may prompt documentation of questions requiring follow-up and can capture how each youth desires to participate in court. A checklist may include space for recording the reasons why tasks were not completed and for noting concerns that arose during meetings.

These tools help to promote consistency in program delivery and to support continuous improvement. They also help to ensure that each youth receives ongoing preparation, guidance and opportunities for expressing one's own voice, which is central to maintaining fidelity to the model.

Data Systems

Data systems are necessary to support program implementation and to ensure accurate monitoring of fidelity and outcomes. Effective data systems require clear processes for collecting and managing information about the delivery of core components as well as indicators of program impact and satisfaction. Necessary modifications to hardware, software and data format should be identified early, along with potential barriers to timely implementation (e.g., limitations of system flexibility or competing priorities of information technology staff). Well-defined expectations and technological tools promote consistent data collection, strengthen accountability and support continuous evaluation of the selected model.

Data to capture about delivery of the program's core components include the interactions of youth with their designated support persons, participation in pre-orientation and post-orientation meetings, engagement during courthouse orientations, and follow-up activities. Data that track program impact -- such as youth understanding of court processes, satisfaction with participation and progress toward permanency goals -- also are important to record.

Program Experts

Each program expert brings specialized knowledge, experience or both in the design, implementation and ongoing delivery of the program. Experts may include the model developer, the model purveyor and other individuals who can provide guidance regarding program fidelity, best practices and effective strategies for implementation. Experts also may support adaptation of the program to fit local contexts, including cultural considerations and relational permanency practices. Experts help to ensure that the program is delivered as intended and that the needs of youth and their families are met.

This program does not have a designated program expert.

Partner Systems and Community Linkages

Successful implementation of a program by child welfare agencies relies on strong partnerships with external systems and collaborators, such as mental health providers, educational institutions, courts, substance use treatment providers and other relevant organizations. Child welfare agencies need to identify partners already engaged with them as well as those to be brought on board. Agency staff also need to determine the strategies, resources and support necessary to engage effectively with these partners. Strong collaboration ensures coordinated services, expands program reach and supports positive outcomes for youth and their families.

Collaboration with key court partners—such as Court Improvement Programs (CIP), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and other advocacy organizations for children and youth—can strengthen program model development and support engagement with legal professionals. Persons responsible for review and oversight, including those in foster care ombudsman roles and service providers who work directly with youth, may serve as important partners

in program implementation. To keep partners informed, agency staff can share relevant communications (e.g., emailed updates), offer informational events or question-and-answer sessions, and provide concise summaries of program goals and activities. Periodic updates—such as briefings during routine provider meetings and distribution of one-page summaries—help to keep partners aware of progress and expectations throughout the program’s implementation.

Other Resources (Meeting Space, Materials, etc.)

Implementation of a program often requires access to tangible resources, including space for orientation sessions and other meetings, materials and supplies for activities, plus technology for virtual or hybrid delivery. Additional considerations may include travel expenses, meals or snacks for participants and help with logistics that contribute to a welcoming and functional environment for staff and youth. Availability of these resources is essential for smooth program operation and participant engagement.

The court orientation occurs in a courthouse so that youths attending can become familiar with that environment and with court processes. Supplies for this event include lanyards, folders or binders containing reference materials, pens and printed agendas. Caregivers, caseworkers and other available support persons need to coordinate transportation so that all youths can attend. Light refreshments can help to infuse a welcoming atmosphere. With donated items, gift bags can be assembled so that each youth can receive one as a token of recognition for participation. Anticipating the costs of resources such as materials, transportation and refreshments is important to ensure that the program is implemented sustainably and within budget.



7. Evaluation

The developers of the *Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program* based used *A Framework to Design, Test, Spread, and Sustain Effective Practice in Child Welfare* (Child Welfare Research & Evaluation Framework Workgroup, 2014), to guide the program's development and implementation process. The framework outlines a structured process for building and strengthening interventions in child welfare systems using five phases—Identify and Explore, Develop and Test, Compare and Learn, Replicate and Adapt, and Apply and Improve. These phases guide the progression from identifying the problem to building evidence to integrating the intervention into sustained child welfare practice.

The Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program progressed through the Identify and Explore phase and into the Develop and Test phase, during which the model was designed and piloted. Key activities during this second phase included defining and refining core components, testing approaches to program installation and implementation, and developing processes for monitoring fidelity to assess whether the model was being delivered as intended.

Although a formal evaluation of outcomes was not conducted, these development and testing activities provided critical insights into the feasibility of program implementation. They also informed the refinement of program components and strengthened the model for future, more rigorous evaluation. Future efforts to implement the *Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program* may build on this foundation by incorporating evaluation tools designed to assess the program's impact on youth engagement and permanency outcomes in comparison with other types of interventions.

8. Implementation Lessons Learned and Tips

Successful implementation of the *Permanency Planning and Court Orientation Program* requires thoughtful planning, coordination and clear communication. The following guidance is organized into two parts:

- 1. Program Planning and Preparation:** overarching lessons learned related to setting up the program and its youth preparation and engagement components
- 2. Stage-Specific Lessons Learned and Tips:** practical guidance for implementing each stage of the program, from youth intake through follow-up and debriefing after court hearings and case planning meetings

Program Planning and Preparation

Begin by establishing a strong foundation to ensure smooth execution of the program.

FORMATION OF A PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Lessons Learned

- A cross-disciplinary planning team strengthens coordination and produces a sense of shared ownership among team members.
- Early relationship building with internal and external partners supports buy-in and alignment of partners with agency staff.
- Clearly defined roles for logistics, content development, youth engagement and evaluation are important.

Tips

- Form a planning team that includes the following:
 - » court partners
 - » child welfare professionals
 - » individuals who have lived experience
 - » agency leaders
- Clarify responsibilities early to streamline communication and decision-making.
- Schedule regular check-ins for monitoring progress, troubleshooting challenges and supporting team members' alignment.

IDENTIFICATION OF KEY PARTNERS

Lessons Learned

- Program success depends on collaboration with a range of court personnel and child welfare partners.
- Individuals who have lived experience provide critical insights about meaningful engagement with youth.

Tips

- Identify and engage with all potential partners early. These include the following:
 - » Court Improvement Programs (CIP)
 - » Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
 - » judges and advocacy organizations
 - » caseworkers, supervisors, agency leaders and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) staff
- When possible, involve youths currently or formerly in foster care to inform program design and implementation.

PLAN FOR PROGRAM OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS

Lessons Learned

- Advance work needs to include selection and organization of court orientation content (e.g., panel discussion, mock hearing, courthouse tour, icebreakers).
- Arrangements for venue, scheduling and materials require planning.
- Coordination with court personnel is essential for scheduling orientation activities and supporting youth participation.
- Youth outreach and enrollment need to include establishment of eligibility criteria, notification of acceptance into the program and tracking of progress.
- Because transportation needs, court calendars and levels of youth readiness vary, adaptable planning is necessary.
- Engagement supports (e.g., provision of food and other incentives) promote a youth-centered environment.

Tips

- Prepare a logistics plan that includes the following:
 - » activity flow and agenda
 - » courtroom and other venue access
 - » materials and supplies (e.g., binders, pens, agendas, goody bags, surveys)
- Establish and clearly communicate outreach and enrollment processes to designated support persons to ensure timely participation.
- Work with court partners to identify flexible windows for scheduling orientation sessions.
- Prepare contingency plans for the following:
 - » transportation challenges
 - » late scheduling changes
 - » youths who may need additional preparation
- Maintain regular communication with partners to ensure that adjustments will be made smoothly.
- Incorporate youth-friendly elements to make the orientation event feel welcoming and to encourage engagement.

Stage-Specific Lessons Learned and Tips

STAGE 1: PRE-ORIENTATION MEETING WITH YOUTH

Lessons Learned

- The structured program typically spans 5 or 6 months. The first stage sets the foundation for sustaining youth engagement.
- Embedding each stage within an existing structure, such as monthly home visits with a caseworker, minimizes demands on an already busy schedule.
- Preparing and prioritizing talking points enables efficient use of time-limited, scheduled visits.
- Youth voice and engagement need to continue after the formal program ends. They require ongoing support as part of routine case practice.
- Some youths may feel hesitant or anxious about participating in court orientation activities. Reassurance and clarity can increase their comfort levels.

Tips

- To simplify scheduling, integrate introductory conversations about the program into already planned contacts with youth, such as monthly home visits.
- Use materials such as handouts, flyers and other tools to guide discussion and to set expectations.
- Discuss participation options so that youths understand what they will learn about permanency and court processes, what their roles in these processes will be and how to use the processes to contribute to their own permanency planning.
- Encourage partnership with youth by exploring how young persons want their voices reflected in meetings and court appearances.
- Set expectations early with caseworkers, supervisors and youths that the practice of building youth voice will continue throughout and after the program.
- Begin integrating goals for youth participation into ongoing case planning and permanency activities.

STAGE 2: COURT ORIENTATION

Lessons Learned

- Coordination with court personnel is required to confirm the schedule, courtroom access and staff availability.
- Lack of transportation and other barriers to accessibility may affect youth participation.
- Small group sizes in some jurisdictions may affect group dynamics, requiring an alternative strategy for youth engagement.
- Flexibility to accommodate variations in youth readiness and availability of court personnel may be necessary.
- The court orientation is one step of many in the process of achieving youth comfort and ongoing youth voice.

Tips

- Ensure adequate facilitation to guide each youth through the event.
- Use interactive, youth-centered activities (e.g., mock hearings, panel discussions, icebreakers).
- Provide youths with binders, agendas and tools for reflecting on their experiences in court.
- Use short surveys to collect youth feedback to inform future improvements.
- Use this event to reinforce the understanding that elevation of youth voice will continue throughout the court process and in ongoing casework.

STAGE 3: POST-ORIENTATION MEETINGS WITH YOUTH

Lessons Learned

- To minimize demands on busy schedules, each post-orientation discussion ideally takes place within a monthly home visit or another planned touchpoint with a youth.
- Designated support persons need to come prepared with necessary documents to facilitate meaningful discussions.
- Some youths may require extra help understanding court rules and procedures.
- Supporting youth voice needs to become an ongoing practice that influences case planning throughout and after the program.

Tips

- Discuss each youth's experience and reflections following the court orientation.
- Review the permanency and case plans to ensure that they support developing youth voice for court appearances.
- Use guides, checklists and similar tools to ensure consistent implementation of youth-centered practices.
- Encourage youth participation in family team meetings and other planning sessions.
- Integrate goals for youth voice into ongoing case planning.

STAGE 4: YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN COURT

Lessons Learned

- Some youths may feel nervous or anxious about participating. Preparing them and reassuring them are keys to putting them at ease.
- Because court schedules can change unexpectedly, flexibility is needed.
- Incomplete submissions to a court may limit participation by youth or their ability to express their views fully.
- Coordination with judges, attorneys and other partners is important to facilitate youth participation.
- This stage is not the end point. To sustain youth empowerment, support for youth voice needs to continue after court appearances.

Tips

- Support youths as they choose their preferred methods of participation (observe, speak or submit written input).
- Prepare youths through role-play or a review of court procedures.
- Track deadlines for submissions to courts, and follow up to ensure elevation of youth voice in the submissions.
- Point out that the designated support person may accompany or support a youth during hearings.
- Use the experience in court to identify how youths want to continue contributing to their own case planning after their hearings.

STAGE 5: FOLLOW-UP AFTER COURT APPEARANCE

Lessons Learned

- Some youths may need help processing their case outcomes and emotional responses.
- Balancing words of encouragement with realistic expectations of court results is important.
- Sustaining youth engagement after the program ends requires planning and follow-through.
- The formal program concludes after 5 or 6 months, but efforts to elevate youth voice need to continue as part of standard child welfare practice.

Tips

- Debrief with each youth about the court experience by addressing questions and reflections as well as next steps.
- Stress the importance of youth voice; explain how youth input will continue to shape permanency planning.
- Connect youths with the supports and resources they need to implement their plans.
- Document conversations to ensure continuity in the next steps of permanency planning.
- As a supervisor, support caseworkers by reviewing their follow-up practices and helping them with problem-solving to overcome challenges.
- Continue integrating goals for youth participation into ongoing case planning and permanency activities.
- Establish the structures and supports necessary to ensure that youth-centered practices are understood and will be sustained by caseworkers and supervisors beyond the formal program timeframe.

9. Additional Program Materials

Find program materials that
support implementation here:

SCAN HERE



CLICK HERE



References

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